

THE ARGOSY.

VOL. XXIV.

APRIL, 1897.

No. 1.

THE TARGET OF FATE.

Concerning the mystery that surrounds the early days of John Hartfield—The widespread sensation following the chance glimpse of a portrait—Developments that shake the town of Newcomb to its foundations.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.—A BAD START.

"HIS younger than I thought he'd be."

"You mean that you thought he'd look, I guess, Miss Tagford. You know Elder Brink told us he was thirty three. I'm sure it was a very excellent sermon he gave us this morning. He's smart, if he hasn't got many years over his head."

"Kind of sad looking, don't you think, Mrs. Kingsbury?"

Mrs. Porter came up beside the two with this remark. She had been just behind with her husband, but had quickened her steps when she found the couple in front were talking about the new minister. Miss Tagford eagerly seized upon this tangible subject for further gossip. Without giving her companion a chance to reply she spoke across her:

"Oh, good morning, Mrs. Porter. Now you mention it, it was sadness I saw in his eyes. Wonder what it can be? A young man like him, too, so well favored and got a charge just as soon's he's out of the seminary. Did you hear Elder Brink say as he'd had any family trouble, Mrs. Kingsbury?"

"Here, here, let the poor man rest for a while now. It must have been hard enough for him to get up and face all these people for the first time without havin' 'em all pick him to pieces like a pack of vultures."

Bluff, good natured Deacon Porter had forced his way in among the trio in front of him, and grasping his wife's arm proceeded to hurry her on ahead.

"Richard!" she said in her emphatic tone of disapproval.

Miss Tagford began to giggle, while a faint color suffused itself over Mrs. Kingsbury's face and brow. She hated gossip above all things. She was glad her gate was so close at hand. With a curt "Good morning" to Miss Tagford she turned in and hurried up the pathway to the house.

The gentle May breeze stirred the leaves of a cherry tree standing in the front yard and showered her with its wealth of white blossoms. She caught

one of them in her hand and glanced from it to the young girl who had just come to the doorway and stood there waiting for her. It seemed as though she was comparing the two.

"Well, mother, how was he?"

Grace Kingsbury smiled as she spoke, that smile of welcome she never failed to give her mother even when they had been separated for only so short a time as had been the case that morning.

"I wish you had gone, Grace. I can't begin to tell you how much I think of him. We all liked him. How is father?"

The last query was as unfailing between these two women as the smile of welcome.

"He's just dropped asleep. We were listening to the singing of the last hymn. Do you know, mother, that always seems as much a sign of spring to me as a bluebird or the finding of a crocus does. I mean the being able to hear the singing from the church through the open windows. Did you meet Mr. Hartfield? Did anybody introduce you?"

"No; hush, Grace, there he comes now. That tall young man, with Mrs. Colgate."

The girl turned to look, but at that instant there came a call from inside of "Grace!"

"Yes, father," and she was back in the sitting room bending over the pallid faced sufferer on the lounge.

The people of Newcomb took it as a matter of course that the new minister should go home for his first Sunday dinner with the Colgates. Indeed, nobody else had thought of inviting him. Mr. Colgate was the leading merchant in the town. In olden times he would have been called "the Squire." He lived in a great house, surmounted by a hideous mansard roof, capped with a gilded railing and surrounded by spacious grounds, dotted here and there with an iron figure of a deer or lion which the more simple minded of the townspeople looked upon as marvels of beauty and grew to regard as the very badge of wealth.

Mrs. Colgate was a meek little woman, who never seemed to grow accustomed to the money that had come to them. She spoke but seldom, as if fearful of saying the wrong thing, but her taciturnity was more than atoned for by her husband and son.

Hartfield had heard about the Colgates through Elder Brink, and so he had been in a measure prepared for them. He knew that Mr. Colgate was the financial pillar of the church, of which he and his wife were also members. When he received that invitation to dinner after his first service he personally wanted to decline.

It was the first sermon he had ever preached to a regular congregation. His nerves were tingling yet from the force he had thrown into it. He wanted to go back to the quiet parsonage and think it all over by himself, to try and realize that he, John Hartfield, was actually embarked on a career which, had any one predicted it for him five years before, he would have rated as among the impossibilities.

But he soon saw that the Colgates would be offended if he did not go.

Mr. Colgate had met him at the station the night before with his carriage. He had seen that his baggage was taken to the parsonage and in other ways had been extremely kind. How tiresome he was, though!

"Fine congregation we had this morning, Mr. Hartfield," he said as they walked off together. "You ought to feel complimented, upon my word."

"I shall feel more complimented if I have as big an audience tonight. Curiosity over a novelty accounted for the crowd this morning, you know."

Mr. Colgate winced a little at this. He never went to church at night himself. He considered it beneath his dignity as the leading man of the village to show himself in public too often. He eased his conscience in this matter by telling the sexton that his well located pew was at the disposal of any one who might care to occupy it.

"Ha, ha," he laughed now, evading the point at issue. "I see you are exceedingly modest. Well, I suppose that is right for a young man just starting out in life."

The patronage conveyed in these words stung John Hartfield to the quick. The implication was that Thomas Colgate had earned the right to display pride in his achievements. The minister buried the finger tips of his right hand deep in his palm and placed his other on his clerical cut vest as if to re-adjust his tie. It was at this moment they were passing the Kingsbury cottage. Mr. Colgate took off his hat and bowed with more than usual ceremony to Mrs. Kingsbury. He wished her not to fail to note that he had the new minister's company.

"Who is that?" asked Hartfield when they had passed. "She has a sweet face, that looks as though it had seen a deal of suffering. I noticed her in church. She seemed to be very attentive."

Mr. Colgate turned a sharp look on his companion.

"Oh, then you do have time to pay heed to what your congregation is doing while you are preaching." He said this half laughingly, but with a vivid recollection of his tendency to somnolency about the time "thirdly" was reached. Then, without waiting for a reply, he went on: "That is Mrs. Kingsbury. Her husband was injured in the war and has been an invalid ever since. They live on his pension."

"Yes, Mr. Hartfield," Mrs. Colgate broke in here, "you never saw more devotion than that mother and daughter pay that man. One of them is always with him. That's the reason Grace was not in church this morning. I suppose she will be out tonight. They live so near she can just run in."

"Ma thinks she's the prettiest girl in town," Peyton Colgate volunteered at this point. "But she isn't in it with Kate Barclay to my mind."

"Peyton!" said his mother in the strictest tone she ever assumed.

Mr. Colgate proceeded, ignoring the interruption of his son, whose hits of slang, it may be stated, did not jar on him as they did on his wife. He had a feeling that they made the boy more like city bred youths.

"The Kingsburys are very worthy people. To be sure they have not much of this world's goods, but then what they can't contribute in money to the work of the church they give in service. Oh, Miss Tagford, good morning."

After she had been deserted by both the Porters and Mrs. Kingsbury the gossip loving old maid, knowing that Mr. Hartfield would presently be along with the Colgates, had lingered on the path till she heard them coming, then turned and stopped the merchant with :

"Ah, Mr. Colgate, I would like to speak to you one minute, if you please."

All she had to say was to express a hope that her cow, which he had given her permission to pasture in his meadow, did not annoy him. But it afforded her the opportunity for the coveted introduction to the minister, which she acknowledged with a sweeping courtesy and a lowering of the eyes in maidenly shyness.

Affliction had not been blessed to Miss Caroline Tagford. Her lover had died two weeks before their marriage and her disposition had been soured ever since. She was always envying other people their good luck and trying to find flaws in their characters. She was forty six, but her discontented disposition gave her face a querulous expression which made her look older.

She now had no hesitation in joining herself to Mr. Colgate and the minister, and walking with them toward Elm Street. She was sorry that almost everybody was going the same way. There was less chance of her meeting friends and "showing off" the company she was in.

"How do you like Newcomb, Mr. Hartfield?" she began, with the little titter that succeeded so many of her speeches.

"As I've only been here half a day, Miss Tagford, I'm as yet hardly prepared to state. It wouldn't do for me to be like the foreign actresses who are interviewed by the New York reporters before they are half way up the harbor."

"Actresses!" Miss Tagford repeated the word in accents of mingled horror and mystification.

Mr. Colgate looked his astonishment, and Peyton, who had lingered with the group in the rear, to see the fun of "Carrie Tagford making up to the minister" emitted a half suppressed whistle. A quick pallor overspread Hartfield's face, succeeded by a wave of crimson, as he replied: "Well, perhaps I should include all notable people from Europe, authors and lecturers, who are asked how they like America before they have set foot on its soil."

Miss Tagford looked as if she was trying to decide whether she had been insulted or not. It was not quite clear to her mind what Mr. Hartfield meant. But he had certainly used the word actresses, a term which respectable folk in Newcomb very seldom permitted to pass their lips. And here was the minister employing it!

She had not reached her own gate yet, but she suddenly decided she would prefer slipping off and going up King Street to tell Delia Mullins that the new minister was mighty queer, to continuing her walk with him. With a short "Good morning, Mr. Hartfield," and more cordial adieux to the Colgates, she turned away, her small mind full to bursting of the new impressions she had taken into it.

Hartfield, meantime, still kept two white teeth pressing against his under

lip. He wished more ardently than ever for the seclusion of the parsonage. He realized that he had committed an indiscretion, a very trifling one, to be sure, but he well knew how with one in his position molehills would be magnified into mountains. But by this time they had reached the Colgate place, and in the pride of displaying its attractions to his guest its owner forgot what had puzzled him in that little speech about actresses.

"Here we are," he announced, with as much of a flourish as intonation can give to speech.

Hartfield knew that he was expected to be impressed. And he was—by the bad taste everywhere visible. The iron groups on the grass, already alluded to, were atrocious enough, but directly in front of the door was an immense glazed ball, resting in a tripod and reflecting on its mirror-like surface a flower bed of fish geraniums laid out in the shape of the letter C and an iron bench placed under an evergreen that was more suggestive of a cemetery lot than anything else Hartfield could call to mind.

"You have a beautiful lawn, Mr. Colgate," he said.

This was true. Vulgar love of display could find nothing to work upon in the grass, which was a deep green and freshly cut.

"But it's a great care, Mr. Hartfield, a great care," rejoined the merchant.

And then he threw open the front door with the air of one who said: "If you admire the outside what must you think of this?" Pretentious chromos adorned the walls. The parlor was crowded so full of furniture heavily upholstered that its atmosphere was stuffy almost to suffocation, and Hartfield hailed with delight Mr. Colgate's suggestion that Peyton should take the minister up to one of the spare rooms that he might make ready for dinner.

Peyton Colgate was just eighteen—old enough to think himself a man, but with not sufficient sense to pass for one. He had been indulged by his father from infancy and did pretty much as he liked most of the time. He never failed to recollect that the "governor" was the "magnate," as he would have termed it himself, of Newcomb. Consequently he stood in no awe of any one else whom he met in the town. The new minister was young, younger looking than he really was, as has been said; he wore a mustache and did not look a bit sanctimonious like old Dr. Bemis, his predecessor in the charge; then his remark about actresses had fired Peyton with the determination to draw him out.

He began the process when he had ushered their guest into a pink and blue bedroom and pointed to the pitcher and basin on the stand between the windows.

"Have you ever been in New York?" he commenced, perching himself on one of the window sills where he could look into his companion's face as he prepared for his ablutions.

"Yes," was the guarded answer.

"You quite shocked Miss Tagford by what you said about actresses," went on Peyton with a laugh. "They're awfully poky in this town. We never have any shows here except the circus once a year. I s'pose you've been to the theatre—I mean of course before you were a minister?"

Before Peyton had quite finished his question Hartfield had plunged his face into the basin of water. When he was in condition for speech again he took the initiative and began to question Peyton about his school, and whether he was going to college or not.

Young Colgate managed to get the lead again on the last named subject, and as they were going down stairs inquired from what college Hartfield had graduated.

"Oh, I went to Columbia," answered the minister after the briefest possible hesitation—a pause of which Peyton thought nothing at the time.

He decided that Mr. Hartfield was not going to turn out such jolly company as he thought he might, and much to that gentleman's relief withdrew his attentions from him for the rest of his stay at the house.

"So this is your first charge," said Mr. Colgate patronizingly, as he got up to carve the roast beef.

Hartfield's foot twitched uneasily under the table. He wondered if "the leading merchant" of Newcomb realized that he was talking to a man thirty three years old and not to a boy of ten. Before he had time to reply Mrs. Colgate, with woman's tact, broke in with:

"It must be hard for you to come away among strangers like this, Mr. Hartfield. Where is your home? I don't know as I heard."

"I was born and brought up in New York, Mrs. Colgate. I think I shall not be homesick in Newcomb, however. I shall have my work to fill my thoughts, you know."

"But that parsonage is such a great barracks of a place for one man to live in," went on the hostess. "Dr. Bemis had a large family, you know. I am afraid you will get homesick there."

"Oh, don't worry about Hartfield, Lucinda. It won't be long before he'll pick out a wife from among our pretty Newcomb girls, and then there'll be no fear of homesickness."

Mr. Colgate shook with the laughter this suggestion caused him. Peyton, too, seemed greatly to enjoy it, and even ventured to name over a few desirable candidates till checked by his mother, who, poor woman, flushed almost as deeply as did Hartfield.

The latter was thankful that Sunday school was at three o'clock, thus giving him a chance to leave immediately after dinner to go home and prepare for the address he would be expected to deliver. He breathed a long sigh of relief when he turned out of the grounds.

"I'm afraid I've made a bad start," he muttered to himself as he walked quickly off toward the parsonage.

CHAPTER II.—THE TWO PORTRAITS.

THE manse belonging to the Presbyterian Church in Newcomb had been left to the organization by Mrs. Coombes, who died the last of her line. It was a roomy old house standing in the midst of an ample garden whose trees were now white and pink with blossoms. When Dr. Bemis went away, Catherine, who had been cook of the family, was asked to stay and take care

of things till his successor had arrived, and now that he turned out to be a bachelor, it was arranged that the old woman should remain in the capacity of cook and housekeeper.

Hartfield was delighted with the place. There was plenty of room for the great stack of books he had brought, and a large apartment on the upper floor which he at once transformed into a gymnasium. Thither he resorted now when he arrived from the Colgates'. Throwing off his coat, he closed the door and then proceeded to pummel with all his might a sandbag which he had suspended from the ceiling the night before.

"How shocked they would be," he reflected with a smile, "if they could see me prepare in this way for my address to the children! But I must have some outlet. How I ha——"

He checked himself suddenly. He stepped back quickly out of the way of the swinging bag, both arms at his side. He put his coat on again and went slowly down the stairs to the room he had elected to make his study. He remained here a few moments in quiet meditation, then started as the ringing of the church bell broke on his ear. He picked up his hat and hurried off to the session of the Sunday school.

Elder Brink was standing in the churchyard, evidently waiting for him. He was the chairman of the committee that had secured Hartfield's services from the Seminary. He was a plain man, but sincere and of kindly nature.

"I thought you'd feel a little strange about goin' in alone," he said now as he shook hands. "If you hadn't been with Mr. Colgate I'd have stopped at the parsonage for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Brink. You are very thoughtful. Let me see, who did you say was your superintendent?"

"Mr. Rauger. He's a young man, but he keeps the school in first class shape. Come in and I'll introduce you to him."

Five minutes later Hartfield was seated on the platform quietly taking his observations of the school while the superintendent conducted the opening exercises. One face among the lady teachers arrested his attention. There was a trace of familiarity about it, and yet he was sure that he had never seen the girl before. She was very young, evidently not yet twenty, but there was a sweetness of expression in her face, almost a pathos, that gave to it a touch of deeper maturity.

He made his address, and then, during the half hour assigned for the study of the lesson, he started out under Mr. Rauger's guidance, to make the personal acquaintance of the scholars and teachers. When he reached the class whose teacher he had been observing, he started at mention of the name "Miss Kingsbury."

"Now I know where I have seen you," he said with a smile as he shook hands.

"Seen me?" she repeated. "I wasn't at church this morning."

"No, but your mother was. You do not look like her, perhaps, but there is something in your face that reminded me very strongly of her."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Mr. Hartfield. Mother and I are very fond of each other."

The minister then proceeded to make the acquaintance of the girls in the class. When the session was over there was a general gathering about the platform and a disposition manifested to organize an informal little reception. The minister was certainly a very attractive man. Fully six feet in height, with an erect carriage and a face both strong and good looking, it was no wonder the ladies were all eager to get better acquainted with him. But Grace Kingsbury did not linger. She had promised to return home as soon as school was over. She knew her mother would be anxious to hear about it.

Miss Tagford was not connected with the school, but this afternoon she could not resist putting on her hat and running around there just about dismissing time.

Delia Mullins had declared up and down that she didn't believe the minister had said anything he oughtn't to say about actresses.

"You know the way you have of magnifying things, Caroline," she concluded, on which Miss Tagford had bridled up and taken a speedy departure, with the parting admonition that all Miss Mullins had to do was to wait and see.

Miss Tagford, growing tired of waiting herself, had now sallied forth to do a little more seeing. It so chanced that she met Grace Kingsbury just as the latter was leaving the churchyard.

"Was the minister out to Sunday school?" she inquired, putting out a detaining hand to stop Grace, who would have hurried on with only a bow.

"Yes."

"Did you meet him?"

"Yes, we were all introduced."

"How do you like him?"

"Very much. He seems to take a real interest in everything connected with the church."

"I don't mean that. How do you like him to talk to? Do you think he acts much like a minister ought to act?"

"Why, Miss Tagford, what do you mean? Of course he acts like a minister."

"I don't think so. Talking about actresses and all that. But I want to see Mr. Ranger a minute and must be going," and Miss Tagford went on into the Sunday school room before Grace could ask for an explanation of her words.

"What could she mean?" the girl reflected as she continued on her way home. "But then it won't do to put much faith in what she says. Still, how did she happen to think of that?"

Grace told her mother of the pleasant interview she had had with Mr. Hartfield. Mrs. Kingsbury was both pleased and surprised to hear that he had noticed her in church.

"I want you to hear him preach, Grace," she said. "It just seems as if he was talking right out of his heart."

So the girl herself thought that night when she went to service. There was an unusually large congregation for the evening. Mrs. Colgate was out with

Peyton, and more than the customary number of young men with their sweet-hearts. But Grace Kingsbury was alone. She had always been of a retiring disposition. She had many admirers among the youths of Newcomb, but they all fancied her more than she did them, and as she did not think it honest not to show this, they soon ceased the effort to show her attention. Besides, her whole heart was given to those at home, her invalid father, for whom she was staff, amanuensis, reader, soother of pain; and the mother was to her like a sister almost. She did not feel the need of companionships outside of these and of that which her work in the Sunday school furnished her.

Now as she sat there in the short pew the Kingsburys rented, her eyes fixed on the new minister's face as he preached the "old, old story" in a way that made it seem new to her, she was conscious of a strong desire to know better this man who was so different from those with whom she was commonly brought in contact. She found her thoughts unconsciously straying back to the afternoon, when he had told her she reminded him of her mother. Even though he had smiled as he spoke there was a sadness in his eyes. She wondered if he had lost his own mother recently. He did not seem like a man who would care to talk about himself. But she would like to hear—

"Now a brief moment of devotion."

Grace gave a guilty start. The sermon was ended in the midst of her thoughts that had wandered from it to the preacher. She bowed her head and gently chided herself. When they rose to sing the last hymn she kept her eyes fixed on the book, although the words were perfectly familiar to her.

After the benediction she started to hurry home, as she always did, but half way down the aisle Mrs. Porter stopped her with a message to take to her mother about the sewing society. While she was talking with her, a voice just behind her said: "Good evening, Miss Kingsbury."

It was Mr. Hartfield. He had his hat in his hand. A crowd immediately gathered about him, but as he saw Grace making her way out of it, he bent toward her and added: "If you will allow me, I should be glad to walk to your gate with you."

A faint flush came into her cheeks.

"I am not—you are very kind," she replied, the flush deepening a little. It was so unexpected that she scarcely knew how to reply.

Mr. Hartfield said a general good night and followed her to the door.

"I—I hope you didn't think that you ought to see me home because I was alone," began Grace. "Newcomb isn't a city and we live close by."

"No, I did it because—because I wanted to."

It was his turn to hesitate now. But he went on quickly:

"I have heard about you all, and if it is not too late I should like to meet your mother and father. I have made the acquaintance of most of my people today—a great many after church this morning."

"Yes, mother will be very glad to see you. You know we can't both go out together on account of father. He is an invalid."

By this time they had reached the cottage. "Mother, here is Mr. Hartfield," said Grace, as she pushed open the door.

The eyes of the sufferer on the lounge lighted up. He had not dared to

hope for this—to see so soon the new minister about whom everybody was talking. Hartfield, in his turn, enjoyed the call, brief though he made it, very much. The Kingsburys were in such contrast to the Colgates. Quiet people, with bookish tastes, consorting with them suggested other themes of converse than themselves or their neighbors.

The minister went away feeling refreshed in spirit. It was a happy ending of a hard day. When he reached the parsonage he did not go up to the top floor and pummel the sand bag. He threw himself on the lounge in his study without lighting the lamp, and clasping his hands behind his head, lay there thinking.

It was not going to be such plain sailing as he had hoped. His three years in the seminary had not entirely obliterated his old self. He recalled the slip he had made in talking with Miss Tagford. What an insignificant thing it was! And yet he knew that it had made a deep impression on those who heard it. Miss Tagford would be inclined to watch him closely hereafter.

Mr. Colgate, too, he feared he had antagonized somewhat in spite of his good resolutions to bear with him. And suddenly he recollected a woman with a little child by the hand, who had waited to be introduced to him after morning service. There was a crowd about him at the time; he had shaken hands and said he was glad to know her, but had not spoken to the little girl. He had a dim recollection now of having seen the child pushed toward him; but Mr. Colgate had come up at that minute and his attention had been diverted. The same woman—he could not recall her name now—had been out at evening service. The little child was with her again and had gone to sleep. He feared now that the mother had waited for him once more. But he had been in a hurry to speak to Grace Kingsbury, and had given her no chance for another interview.

And that walk home with Miss Kingsbury! He wondered if there would be any one to call him to account for that. But he would insist on being permitted a certain line of independence. He realized, however, that it would not be prudent for him to go home with her again the following Sunday.

Presently he rose, struck a light and went out into the hall to unlock one of his trunks. From it he took a small plush case containing several photographs. Selecting two of these, he took them back into the study with him, and sitting down by the table, held them up in front of him and gazed at them intently.

They were the portraits of a young man and woman, both very young, apparently. The woman, who was in evening dress, was very beautiful. The man was Hartfield himself. He was in full dress, too, and there was a sort of roguish smile about the lips.

For fully five minutes Hartfield gazed at these two pictures; then, putting them face downward on the table, he leaned his head on his hand and murmured softly: "Yes, the same, the same. I must not forget that."

He rose, put the photographs back in the plush case, then placed this in a drawer of the desk, which he locked. Then he took a book from the library

and read until after ten, when he started to retire. As he passed through the silent halls, Mrs. Colgate's words at dinner recurred to him. And now somehow he felt as if there was some truth in them. The place did seem great and barrack-like to shelter him alone.

"But I am not worthy of anything else. I must not think of it," he told himself.

When he reached his bed chamber he went to the window and threw the shutters open. There was no moon, but the stars were bright.

He sat down on the window sill and was reminded of Peyton Colgate as he did so.

"I wonder if that boy suspects," he mused. "But he can't. It's only a fancy of mine. But there was that slip about actresses. I must be ever on the alert. Even such a little thing weighs as a great one now."

He sighed, took one more look at Mars, glowing red in the heavens, then closed the shutters.

CHAPTER III.—THE PROPOSAL.

In a fortnight's time the new minister became the talk of the town. And this is not solely because he proved to be a popular preacher and filled the church at both services. There was another reason than this, and it lay in the fact that his own congregation was divided in its opinions concerning him. By far the greater number liked him and right royally espoused his cause. But they did not succeed in winning over the prejudiced ones.

"He's too easy mannered for a minister," said old Mrs. Sleeper. "Haven't you seen him when he bows to a woman on the street? It ain't right for a servant of the Lord to take his hat off the way Mr. Hartfield does it."

"An' he keeps a fast horse over at the Haukinses' livery stable." This from Miss Tagford, who had treasured up this bit of news that she might spring it upon the assembled ladies of the sewing circle. "He nearly run over me the other night when I was crossing the street."

"He's got money of his own, I hear tell," put in Mrs. Porter.

"He'd better put it into Bibles for the heathen than horseflesh for his own pleasure." Mrs. Robbious frowned darkly over the seam she was stitching as she spoke. She had never forgiven Hartfield for not noticing Dora, with her beautiful flaxen curls, that first Sunday.

"He gave me ten dollars for our missionary fund the other day," Mrs. Kingsbury ventured to interpose.

There was no reply made to this, except a sort of "Umph" uttered by two or three of those present, Miss Tagford among them. In spite of Hartfield's care his attentions to Grace Kingsbury were already the occasion of remark.

"He's doing lots of good, I think," now spoke up Mrs. Brink, who was a little hard of hearing. She had not quite caught the drift of the last remarks, but knew that they were talking about the minister. "We never had such big congregations before."

"But what do people come for mostly?" retorted Mrs. Robbins. Like they'd go to a show. He stands there in the pulpit an' don't have even the Bible in front of him, an' talks away fast as he can about the Lord loving everybody, even the wicked. Of course people like to hear that. They think they can go on being wicked just the same and then step in at the eleventh hour."

"Oh, Mrs. Robbins," broke in Mrs. Kingsbury, "I don't think Mr. Hartfield means to preach that doctrine."

"I can't help what he means to do. I'm only tellin' of what he does."

"Did you hear what he said at the funeral of Mr. Hobson the other day?" remarked a woman with a thin nose and sharp lips, who had not yet spoken.

"No, no. What was it?" There was a general dropping of work into laps and an eager leaning forward of heads, even of those who had never professed any hostility toward the new pastor.

"Why, he said that while Mr. Hobson may have lived a life of the world there was no limit to God's mercy. Wasn't that dreadful to say, right before the widow, too?"

"What, to let her think her husband had a chance of being saved?" inquired Delia Mullins.

"No, to talk as if there was any doubt about it. 'Don't speak nothin' but good of the dead,' says the proverb."

"But Mr. Hobson was a very wicked man," observed Mrs. Kingsbury. "I've heard him scoff at churches and Sunday schools myself. I think it was very thoughtful in Mr. Hartfield to try and give the widow a little comfort."

This was a little deep for Caroline Tagford. She was anxious to bring the conversation back within the line of her own comprehension.

"Catharine Batters says he's got a place fixed up in the third story of the parsonage like an acrobat's in a circus. There's a bag of some sort hanging there, and he goes up sometimes and punches it just as if he wished it was a man's head."

Miss Tagford's announcement created all the stir she could have wished, for as yet the newest gymnastic appliances had not penetrated to Newcomb.

"I don't see what the committee was thinkin' of when they engaged a man like him," observed Mrs. Robbins, speaking in a discreetly lowered tone so that Mrs. Brink should not hear. "I've heard some of the Baptists say they thought he'd split the church yet."

"But the men all like him," spoke up Mrs. Porter. "The Baptists are only envious because their minister can't draw as big a crowd. My Richard says he just enjoys Sunday comin' round so he can hear Mr. Hartfield preach again."

"Mr. Colgate don't appear to enjoy him much," rejoined she of the thin lips, Mrs. Mason. "He never comes to prayer meeting any more, and wasn't in church last Sunday. I'm sure we don't want to lose him. We can't afford it. He gives to all our societies."

"Not any more than Mr. Hartfield does himself," put in Mrs. Kingsbury. "We never had a minister that was so liberal."

"I wonder where he gets his money," said Mrs. Robbins. "He's mighty close mouthed about his family affairs. He don't get many letters, Sam, down at the post office, tells me."

"It seems to me," observed Delia Mullins, "that we haven't got anything to do with his family or any of that. He's doing more good than Dr. Bemis did."

"My, Delia Mullens, how can you talk like that?"

A sort of shudder of horror ran through the group of malcontents. Now that Dr. Bemis was gone, he was elevated to a kind of pedestal in their memories. He had left because he could not bring up his large family on the small salary the church paid.

"Wait till the next communion," said Mrs. Mason oracularly. "Then we'll see."

They did wait and saw ten young men and four young ladies brought into the church. As a rule this order, under previous pastorates, had been reversed. More women than men were added to the rolls. But as Mrs. Porter observed, Mr. Hartfield was a great favorite with the male portion of the congregation. They were all glad to have him call upon them at their stores, and with the young men especially he was in great demand. He helped them organize an association of their own, and it was from this mainly that the new members had been recruited.

The church had certainly never been in a more prosperous condition. Even Mr. Colgate's lukewarm interest in its affairs, since the new minister's advent did not affect its financial standing. Mr. Hartfield's liberality counterbalanced the merchant's falling off in generosity, and the contributions to the various boards showed no decrease.

But as the Young Men's association prospered and a Boys' Club was undertaken in connection therewith, Mr. Hartfield became earnestly desirous to build or rent a structure as a sort of club house for the latter. To this end he proposed that the young men get up an entertainment to be held in the town hall.

"If you can get some talent in the musical line," he told them, "I will agree to give a short lecture on some popular subject."

The members of the association took hold of the work with enthusiasm, and on the appointed evening the hall was crowded at fifty cents a head. It wasn't the music that had attracted the throng, either; it was the anticipation of a rare treat in hearing the popular young pastor lecture. He had not announced his subject beforehand, and when he stepped to the front of the platform, and stated that he would give the boys and their friends some idea of cowboy life on the plains of Texas, there was a ripple of excitement through the rows of seats.

And what a "talk" that was! His gestures were as eloquent as his tongue; he acted out many of the scenes he described with consummate ability. One could almost imagine himself on the wide prairies of the Lone Star State, astride of a bucking bronco, with a stampeded herd of cattle on one side and a hostile band of Indians charging down upon the other. The applause when he had finished fairly shook the building.

The boys especially were delighted. It was fortunate the lecture was the last thing on the program. They could have never remained quietly in their seats to listen to anything else. But Mrs. Robbins, Mrs. Mason, Miss Tagford and a few others were scandalized. They went about for days thereafter with uplifted hands declaring that they were never so shocked in their lives as when they saw their minister cutting up monkey tricks in public like a mountebank.

"Why, he almost swore there once or twice," Mrs. Robbins affirmed. "I'm so glad I didn't take my Dora."

Of course Mr. Hartfield did not fail to hear some of these comments. But they moved him not at all. He was surer of himself now than when he first arrived in Newcomb. He could not help seeing that a great deal of good was being done under his ministry. He determined that he would not allow a few grumblers to disturb him.

His intimacy with the Kingsburys had been quietly progressing. With a ripper acquaintance his admiration for Grace deepened into something that he was almost fearful of analyzing.

"I'm not worthy," he would murmur to himself in the solitude of his study when the theme would insist on intruding itself into his mind. "To have saved myself 'so as by fire' is enough, without seeking to permit the smell of the smoke to touch the garments of another."

Late in June Mr. Kingsbury died; the mother and daughter were left alone. In his capacity as pastor he was necessarily oftener at the cottage after this event than had been his custom. He found himself, regretfully he it added, drawn more and more each day to the sweet girl whose fine character shone more beautiful in this hour of affliction.

But Hartfield was not as a rule a sociable man. That was one of the objections the discontented spirits raised against him. They said he was not enough of a shepherd—that he didn't go round and visit the lambs of the flock.

"But he's roped in a lot of the 'buttin' old goats," irreverent Jimmy Clarkson, the bar room loafer, observed when he heard about it.

Indeed, so magnetic a power did Mr. Hartfield appear to exercise over the men of the town that Jimmy sometimes trembled in his shoes for fear he might be subjected to the influence himself and turned into a decent man.

The minister electrified the congregation one morning by reminding them after the sermon that Paul said there were "diversities of gifts." He added that while he hoped never to fail in his duty to the widow and the fatherless he had not proposed to become a social pastor.

"Umph, he might well say he don't fail in his duty to the widow and the fatherless," commented Mrs. Robbins. "But he lets that scheming Mrs. Kingsbury and her daughter stand for the whole lot of 'em."

Whether it was because this speech came to his ears or not, certain it was that for several weeks Mr. Hartfield kept studiously away from the Kingsbury cottage. He saw Grace and her mother every Sunday at church and on Wednesday night at prayer meeting. At one of these last services, towards the end of the summer, Grace came alone. It was a very hot night,

and but few people were out. During Elder Brink's prayer low thunder mutterings could be heard and when dismissal time came the rain was falling in torrents. Mrs. Mason, who lived some distance from the church, had come in a covered wagon.

"Get in with me and I'll take you home," she said to three or four of the ladies.

They were glad to avail themselves of the invitation, and the carriage presently drove off, leaving Grace Kingsbury the only woman left to peer anxiously out into the darkness to see if there was no chance of a cessation in the downpour.

"I have an umbrella in the pulpit room. Let me get it and take you home."

Mr. Hartfield had come up with outstretched hand.

Before she could reply he had gone out through the door that gave entrance to the church. He was back in half a minute with the umbrella. When they reached the porch of the cottage,

"I'm ever so much obliged, Mr. Hartfield," said Grace. "Won't you come in a while? Mother has gone to bed. She was quite worn out with the heat today."

Hartfield, as he accepted the invitation and stepped into the hallway, experienced a sort of fierce joy in his heart. He had not realized till this moment, when chance had given him this unexpected tête-à-tête with the girl, how endeared she had become to him. They spoke on commonplace matters for the first few minutes. Somehow a sort of restraint seemed to be upon them both tonight—a restraint that impelled them not to be silent, but to talk animatedly on subjects of a local nature to which they did not as a rule pay much attention. But a reference to the progress the young men were making with their Boys' Club gave Grace the opportunity to remark that this gratifying result was entirely owing to the sympathy Hartfield gave them in all their efforts, working with them as if he were one of themselves.

"I think that is one of the principal reasons why you make such a successful minister," she added.

"Do you really think I make a success of my work, Miss Kingsbury? Frankly now?"

Hartfield's voice had taken on a serious tone, in marked contrast to the lighter one in which till now they had both been speaking.

"Yes, I most certainly do think so, Mr. Hartfield."

"But there are those who do not agree with you. I am not blind to the fact that I have estranged several people in the church. Was it so in Dr. Bemis' time? Did he have so many enemies as I?"

"No. But neither did he have so many friends. His character was not positive enough to make enemies. He was too easy to get along with. You know there have been as many additions in the three months you have been here as in a whole year under him."

There was silence for an instant. Without, the rain beat on the tin roof of the porch with a continuous roar, and the thunder was almost incessant, but gradually growing less loud. Then Hartfield went on:

"You said a little while ago that I was sympathetic. If that is so how does it come about that I have made so many of the people here dissatisfied with me?"

"Because you don't appeal to their natures, which are too narrow to take in the—the——" Grace paused and dropped her eyes. She realized that what she was about to add would be an expression of her own personal opinion of the minister.

"But I ought to reach them in some way," he broke in, apparently ignoring her unfinished sentence. "Am I too proud, too anxious to have my own way in everything? Remember, I have no one to advise me in these matters. I can't talk to some members of the church about others. That is, not in the way that I can talk with you."

Grace Kingsbury's heart throbbed quickly. For weeks she had recognized the fact that her feeling for this man was a deeper one than belonged to one who was simply her pastor. With all the powers at her command she had sought to hide this fact from the eyes of the world, from the knowledge of her mother, even from herself. He was too far above her for her to dare to hope. Her eyes dropped to the floor again now as he spoke the last words. She was afraid of what he might see in them, even by the dim light of the one lamp that was standing on the center table.

The rain was now falling more lightly; the thunder had almost ceased.

Hartfield rose. "I ought to be going," he said.

"No."

There was a pleading note, almost a beseeching one, in Grace's voice, but she rose too. Hartfield took a step nearer to her.

"I do not want to go," he went on, "but—Grace, can you not see that you fill my heart? I want you to take it and direct its purposes. Will you?"

He bent his head towards hers. She was still looking down. Suddenly she raised her eyes. The blended love and happiness that Hartfield read in them thrilled him through and through.

"Am I worthy to do this?" she said softly.

His answer was to fold her in his arms.

"It is I who am the unworthy one, Grace dear," he whispered. "My past is still back of me. All the good that I do in the present cannot blot that out of my memory. Will you take me on trust, for what I am, for what I mean to be?"

"I trust you fully—love and honor you with all my heart. Is not that enough?"

CHAPTER IV.—THE INSISTENT PAST.

THE clock in the Episcopal belfry was tolling ten when Hartfield left the Kingsbury cottage. He walked quickly through the deserted streets. He was not in a hurry to get back to the parsonage for any special work awaiting him there. It seemed that he must move rapidly or be left behind by the tumultuous rush of his thoughts.

It had stopped raining and the air was much cooler than it had been before the storm. Here and there the clouds had parted, exposing patches of starry sky to view. Hartfield noticed one of these and recalled the night he had sat in the window and looked up at the heavens at the close of his first day in Newcomb.

"Did I imagine then," he asked himself, "that I would do what I have done tonight?"

The parsonage had never seemed so quiet to him as it did now when he entered it.

"But there will be life here soon," he murmured, "and happiness—and love."

There was a pallor on his face in the darkness that seemed to belie the silent words on his lips. He went to his own room and sat down in a chair by the open window.

"She loves me," this was his thought. "I should never have said what I did had I not seen that. And then—ah, I am but human—my own love hurried me on, and now I am bound to her, while——"

He shut his lips tightly together. His fingers clinched and unclined themselves.

"The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, aye, they are visited upon themselves, and bitter are the fruits. But *she* trusts me. Yes, but if she knew all, what then? Would she recoil from me, say that I had deceived her, that I was not worthy of any woman's love, not worthy to teach others the way of truth and duty?"

A look of anguish came into his face. The perspiration was thick upon his forehead, but he seemed to take no note of it.

"And I was so happy for a little while tonight when I forgot! But how could I forget? Is not my present manner of living, in such a contrast to what I had planned for myself, a constant reminder of the reason for it? Ah, but love is blind and deaf, everything but dumb, for it can cause the dullest to frame in words the passions in the breast, can hurry on to an avowal him who has no right to speak."

Striving to bring his mind down to quieter contemplation, he endeavored to recall in their order all the events of the evening from the moment when he had offered to escort Grace Kingsbury home. Then he tried to realize what would be his feelings if he had become conscious that the girl cared for him and had himself remained silent.

"Ought I to cause her to suffer for a sin that was all my own? And now that I have committed myself must I become a trifier, go and tell her, after I have made her put into words her love, that I cannot take it—because, because of a rash act once in my life? And then we shall both suffer, her faith mayhap will be tried, and I—I shall be like a ship at sea without its guiding star, I shall despise myself, nor dare even again stand in that pulpit and speak to the people I have sought to help."

He leaned forward till his chin rested in the palm of his hand. His eyes were still fixed on the heavens, across which white clouds were now skurrying as if hastening to remove all traces of the storm and prepare a flawless

sky for the morrow. The winds that caused these to speed along also stirred the leaves of the oak that grew up just outside the window. The gentle rustling seemed in some sense to Hartfield a companionship. The sounds carried him far back to the days of his boyhood, when he used to imagine that all the silent forces of nature had voices with which they could speak to those human beings whose ears were attuned to comprehend them. He had been wont to make up long stories of what the winds and the waves, the roll of the thunder and the rippling of the mountain brook would talk to him about.

Recalling this brought back to him other memories of his boyhood—of that young boyhood when all was innocence and trust, when the world seemed so big, and to look forward to when he would be a man appeared like peering into the future of some other person who had not yet been born. And it was just this way now when he looked back. Not one of the great things he had planned to do had he brought to accomplishment. Instead—what did he see on gazing down the way—a short way, too, it was comparatively—he had come? Nothing but destruction, a pulling down of ideals, an overturning of laws, a mad determination to gratify desire at the expense of all else—all this from the dawn of manhood to six short years ago.

Then he had faced the other way and now was just beginning to find fruit of quite another sort when the sowing of his old days of recklessness confronted him.

"As ye sow ye must reap," he quoted to himself, and for a while he seemed not to hear the leaves moved gently by the summer breeze, but in his ears there lingered yet the crash of the thunder crying "Atone! Atone!"

He rose and crossed the floor to stand for an instant under a painting that hung on the wall opposite the window. It was that of a woman some thirty five years of age, with eyes like his, that seemed to look down at him now as he stood beneath them in the darkness.

"Ah, mother," he murmured softly, "if I had had you longer need it have come to this? What shall I do? Have I not done penance enough, must I go through life denied the happiness that is given to other men because of a moment's folly? A moment—yes, it comes vividly before me again. The music, the floating forms of dancers, the fumes of the wine mounting to my head, the seductive tones of a woman's voice reaching my ear, the daring, the abandon of youth! Was there any thought of God in it all? Ah, no, no, it was blasphemy."

He began to walk up and down the floor. He stopped presently to draw forth his watch, and press the spring of the repeating bell. In silvery chimes twelve strokes rang out, succeeded by a solitary one. It was after midnight.

Hartfield stepped to the window and looked out towards the east. He wished that he could delay the dawning of another day. He felt that he could not bear the sunlight with his mind given over to the chaos that now reigned there.

But why must there be chaos? What if he went to Grace on the morrow and told her and her mother everything? He would abide by their decision; he must abide by it. Then, if they felt that his atonement was not yet

complete, he would accept the verdict and strive to bear its burden. On the other hand, should they agree with the conviction that was now coming over his own spirit, that the past was dead, that he ought not to let it live by being faithful to one of its memories, then this knowledge, shared among these three, would bind them closer to one another.

A sigh escaped him; but it was one of relief. At last it seemed as if light had come to him. At any rate one path of duty was marked out straight before him.

He started to close the shutters before lighting his lamp. The clouds had all disappeared; the stars shone down unhindered. Hartfield took it as an omen of good and turned away, noting not that Mars glowed tonight with a slightly deeper tinge.

CHAPTER V.—THE WOMAN IN THE BALLROOM.

THE news of the minister's engagement to Grace Kingsbury flew through the congregation like wildfire. Exactly how it got out those most deeply interested could never ascertain. Certainly Hartfield did not tell any one; neither did Grace or her mother. The only supposition Hartfield could form in the matter was that old Mr. Briggs, the sexton, who had seen them go away together under the same umbrella that Wednesday night, had jumped at conclusions which he took no pains to keep to himself. And now that the thing was known, he was just as glad that he had not been obliged to announce it formally.

The majority of the congregation were pleased. They thought it the right thing for the pastor to be married and have some one to entertain callers. And the Kingsburys, though they had not lived in the town as long as some others, and had always kept a great deal to themselves, were of very good family, it was understood. But Miss Tagford was particularly acrimonious in her discussion of the affair.

"That Grace was always a forward piece," she declared, "for all she pretended to be so modest, not wantin' to stay an' listen to talk that was plenty good enough for other folks to hear. She was fishin' for the minister all the time."

She went around to call on Catharine Batters the very day she heard the news. To be sure Catharine was only a servant, but she had lived in the town a long time, once next door to the Tagfords. Catharine considered it her Christian duty not to drop her acquaintance because reverses had come to the family. It may be noted that this obligation did not rest so heavily upon her during the days of the Bemises' occupancy of the parsonage.

Miss Tagford chose the hour for her call when she knew the minister would be at a funeral in the next town. She saw Catharine at an upper window, sweeping the study. Miss Tagford marched into the house without the formality of knocking and went straight up stairs.

"Well, Catharine," she said, dropping down on the lounge and fanning herself with a magazine she had picked up, "this is strange news about Mr. Hartfield."

"It is that, Sister Tagford." Catharine had been brought up a Methodist. "You could a' knocked me over with a straw out of my broom when I heard it."

"When are they going to be married, do you know?" Miss Tagford went on. She believed in the principle that if there is anything you want to find out, you should ask about it.

"Laws, I don't know nothin' about it. You don't expect Mr. Hartfield would open his heart to me, do you? Why, things might have gone on this way for a month before I'd have known he was in love, if the butcher's boy hadn't told me this morning. Of course I pretended I knew all about it. I wasn't goin' to have the Ivin'ses suppose I wasn't up to everything that went on in this house."

"Then he don't act like an engaged man, Catharine?"

Miss Tagford was taking in everything in the room with an eager eye as she spoke. She had never before penetrated to this part of the house, and was determined to make the most of her opportunity.

"Not a bit. But he was always a little queer, you know, so maybe there's no chance for him to change any."

Catharine was dusting the desk as she spoke and now looked up from her work with a little exclamation.

"I never knowed him to do this before, though," she said. "Go out an' leave his key in the drawer. He always keeps this side of the desk tight locked. But he was goin' to take Miss Grace to the funeral with him this afternoon. It must a' turned his head a little after all."

"You say he always keeps that side of his desk locked, Catharine." Miss Tagford had risen and come over to the center of the room. Her eyes were fixed on the desk with longing desire. "What do you suppose he's got in there?" she went on. "Something he don't want people to know about, I'll be bound."

"Oh, I guess it ain't nothin' much," retorted Catharine, who, whatever other faults she may have possessed, was not overburdened with curiosity.

At this moment a ring at the bell called her downstairs. A gleam of malicious pleasure came into Miss Tagford's eyes when she saw that she was alone.

"I think I ought to make sure about this thing," she murmured. "As a member of the church it's my duty to find out about it. A minister oughtn't to have any secrets from his people."

She made a sudden dart at the drawer and pulled it open. A look of disappointment overspread her face as at first glance it seemed to contain nothing but sermon paper. But she put her hand down to a spot where something seemed to be tucked in between two of the sheets. She felt two pieces of heavy cardboard. With a fast beating heart she drew them out and found them to be cabinet sized photographs. They were the two portraits Hartfield had gazed at so earnestly at the close of his first Sunday in Newcomb.

Miss Tagford looked from one to the other with a thrill of delight at her mischief loving heart, as soon as she had recognized Hartfield in one of them. She felt as if she had just unlocked Bluebeard's secret chamber. The

pictures had been fastened together, face inward, with a rubber band. She took a good look at them and put them back before Catharine returned. She did not stay long after that. She felt that already she had learned far more than she had hoped to find out when she went up to the minister's study.

Who could that woman in the low cut dress be? Was it possible that Mr. Hartfield had been married once and that this was his first wife? No, that could not be, she decided, for what reason would there be then for his keeping the pictures hidden in that way? And a portrait of himself was kept along with it. Evidently the woman was some one with whom he was very closely associated.

"Maybe he's married now." Miss Tagford's heart almost stopped beating as this idea flashed into her mind. What if this should be so and she should be the one to prove to Mr. Hartfield's admirers that he was a scoundrel?

But how could she do this? She could not very well go around and tell people that she had been looking among the minister's private papers and discovered something that compromised him. She could throw out hints, however, and dark ones, too, and with this object in mind she now turned her steps towards Mrs. Robbins.

Mrs. Robbins was just starting down the street to do some shopping, but Miss Tagford said she would walk along, as she wanted to see if they would tin over an old saucepan for her at Colgate's.

"Of course you've heard the news about the minister?" she began, before they had gone twenty rods together.

"No, what new piece of nonsense has he been up to now?" rejoined Mrs. Robbins. "Is he goin' to give a lecture on how to train for the circus?"

"No, he's engaged to be married to Grace Kingsbury." The old maid came out with the announcement in a burst, as if fearful they might meet some one, if she waited, who would rob her of the pleasure of telling it.

"Of all things! Well, I wish her joy of him. A nice sort of family man he'll make." The slight put upon her Dora still rankled in Mrs. Robbins' mind.

"Well, he ought to make a good one if practice goes for anything," remarked Miss Tagford mysteriously.

"Practice! What do you mean by that, Caroline?" Mrs. Robbins turned a mystified countenance toward her companion.

"Oh, I've heard a thing or two," responded Miss Tagford with a slight toss of the head. As a matter of fact, of course she had heard nothing; it was what her prying eyes had seen on which she had based her statement.

"What have you heard?" persisted Mrs. Robbins.

"Oh, I don't want to make trouble," responded the old maid. "But I'll tell you, Mrs. Robbins, in confidence, mind. I wouldn't wonder if Mr. Hartfield were a married man."

"Caroline Tagford!" ejaculated the other. "How did you find it out? Who is she?"

"I didn't find it out, I tell you. I don't know who it is, but she's mighty bold lookin', all dressed up and her neck showin'!"

"Mercy sakes, Caroline, what are you talking about? You must have seen the woman."

Miss Tagford saw that she had committed an indiscretion.

"Hush, don't say anything," she retorted. "Just wait and see what will come of it. Here's Colgate's. Good by. I'll see you at church tomorrow."

As may be readily conceived, Mrs. Robbins was greatly stirred up by the hints dropped by Miss Tagford. She thought about it all night, and the next morning after service sought out the old maid and tried to get some more facts from her. But Miss Tagford maintained a mysterious reserve and went about with her head in the air as if she were a very exalted personage.

Hartfield and Grace meantime were dwelling in the lovers' paradise.

"It seems as if you are the one I have been looking for all my life," he once told her. "If you had not cared for me, I do not know what I should have done. My nature is a strong one, and when I love it is with all my heart."

"I can't realize it yet sometimes," was her reply. "Take it out of all the others you should have cared for me."

"Don't say that, Grace. It argues very poor taste on my part to intimate that there is anybody else who could attract me."

It was shortly after this episode that the event of Miss Tagford's life occurred. A cousin of hers who had married years before and gone East to live wrote to her stating that her husband had secured a position as clerk at one of the big hotels on Lake George, where she would be pleased to have Caroline come and make her a two weeks' visit. They had a cottage close by the hotel where they took boarders, but if Caroline didn't mind sleeping with Matilda she was welcome to come.

Of course Miss Tagford "didn't mind." She was so elated at the prospect of "going a visiting" that she forgot for a time the startling discovery she had made in the minister's study. But she recalled it in every detail when she reached her cousin's, and "entertained" her hostess by the hour with her speculations on the matter.

"Depend upon it, Emma," she would say, "there's something very queer about the thing. Why, the man got to talking about actresses on the way home from church after his first service. I sometimes think it's my duty to go to that Kingsbury girl and tell her up and down that she'd better make some inquiry about the man she's engaged to before she marries him."

"But you haven't any proof that he's done anything wrong, Caroline," her cousin would retort. "That picture may be a photograph of his sister."

"Sister! Then what does he want to keep it hid away secretly for?"

"She may be dead and—and he thinks of her as sort of sacred. Can't you imagine how it would be, Caroline?"

"No, I can't. There's James Cadmus. I'm sure I thought everything of him an' I don't keep his picture tucked away out of sight."

In spite of her concern about the minister's morals, Miss Tagford managed to enjoy herself at Lake George. When the visit was over she had only one

thing to regret, and that was that it had not been possible for her to know beforehand the circumstance which was to befall on the last night of her stay. It would have added such zest to everything else in the way of anticipation.

On this particular evening there was a hop at the hotel where Emma's husband was employed. Miss Tagford was prevailed upon to overcome her scruples against dancing sufficiently to accompany her cousin over to the piazza, where Bartley procured chairs for them in a good location by one of the windows.

It was a new environment for Caroline Tagford. The dresses of the women in the ballroom were a revelation to her.

"That's the way that creature in the picture looked, Emma," she leaned forward to whisper.

"Isn't it lovely?" returned Mrs. Dunham. "I'm so glad we had this before you went home, Caroline."

Miss Tagford was not especially enchanted. She had had better times than she was having, sitting out there on that draughty piazza, peeping through the slats of a shutter into a brilliantly lighted room, watching a lot of people who were evidently enjoying themselves more than she was. She was about to propose that they get up and walk around a bit when she suddenly clutched her cousin's arm with a fierceness that made poor Emma wince.

"What's the matter, Caroline?" she exclaimed.

"Look, look there. That woman in the yellow satin, with them ribbons streaming down her back."

"Yes, yes, what of her?"

"She's the creature that the minister has got the picture of. She's older lookin', but I'm sure she's the same one."

Miss Tagford's hands were fairly shaking in the excess of her excitement. Her throat had become so dry that she could scarcely speak.

"It can't be, Caroline. It must be somebody that looks like her."

"Why can't it be, Emma? There's no law against it, an' I'd know that woman anywhere. I must speak to her."

Miss Tagford rose and began pushing her chair back.

"Sit down, Caroline," commanded her cousin, pulling fiercely at her shawl. "You mustn't go in there. You ain't dressed."

"Ain't dressed!" Miss Tagford gave a contemptuous sniff. "I'd like to know if I ain't got more on me than them shameless creatures. I tell you I must speak to that woman. It's Providence has brought her in my way like this; I musn't shirk duty when it's marked out plain before me."

"But what are you going to say to her? For mercy's sake do be careful, Caroline. It may cost Bartley his place."

Emma Dunham had risen too, now, and with both hands clasped about her cousin's arm was endeavoring to draw her back into her seat.

"I tell you I must speak to her, Emma," Miss Tagford insisted. "If you don't want to be mixed up in it, you'd better stay here."

Mrs. Dunham, thinking that perhaps her cousin would not be recognized

as having any connection with her, decided that she would act on this suggestion and resumed her seat just as the other succeeded in forcing a passage for herself between the rows of chairs that were banked up in front of every window.

Just how she was going to accomplish her purpose, Miss Tagford had not yet determined. She went around to the office entrance of the hotel and took up her station near the door of the ballroom. She had lost the woman now. She must stand there till she could find her again. She had been dancing with an oldish man, of military bearing; Miss Tagford resolved to keep a lookout for him, too.

At last she saw them both again. They had taken their places in a quadrille not very far away from the door. Miss Tagford squeezed herself close up to the hat shelf and watched them. The woman was pretty; there was no denying that. She certainly looked a good deal like the photograph. She was very vivacious, throwing her head back and laughing up into the face of her partner. The onlooker in the hall could not speak to her now and stop the dance. She must wait for a more fitting opportunity. Meanwhile she could think up what she should say.

But suddenly some one pulled her sleeve and called her name. It was Bartley Dunham, and he wanted to know what she was doing there.

"Can't you see all you want to outside?" he added.

"Yes, but I wanted to speak to that woman there—see, the one in yellow, dancing with the man that's got the gray mustache."

Bartley thrust his arm through hers and drew her out to the piazza.

"You can't speak to her now," he said. "That's Mrs. Westerman. Do you know her?"

"No. Westerman did you say her name was? Is that her husband with her?"

"No, that's Colonel Upton. But if you don't know her what under the sun did you want to speak to her for? Where's Em?"

"Around where we were sittin'. Tell me more about this Mrs. Westerman. Is her husband here?"

"No, she's a widow. She's spending the summer here. She's from New York."

"That's it. He used to live in New York."

"What do you mean, Caroline? Who's he?"

"Why, Mr. Hartfield, our minister—the one I was telling you and Emma about. Mrs. Westerman is the very woman whose picture I found in that drawer."

"Nonsense. It can't be possible. You told us this was a young girl about eighteen. Mrs. Westerman must be nearly thirty. It's only somebody who looks like her."

Miss Tagford began to waver a little herself now. It would take a good deal of assurance to say what she wanted to that proud looking woman. By this time they had reached Mrs. Dunham, who had not been able to keep the chair her cousin had vacated.

"But I think we had better go home now," she said, and with a little

more persuasion they got Caroline to abandon her purpose of seeking an interview with Mrs. Westerman. She admitted reluctantly that possibly the woman was not the one she believed her to be.

But she had gained at least one fact. She had found out the woman's name. Bartley told her it in full—Mrs. Le Roy Westerman. She put it down on a 'piece of paper so that she would not forget it. At any rate she would have a great story to tell to her friends in Newcomb when she got back. Something might come of it after all. She was glad that she was going home the next day. It seemed as if she couldn't wait to tell the news.

CHAPTER VI.—THE ANONYMOUS LETTER.

CONTRARY to her first intention, Miss Tagford did not blazon abroad her discovery at Lake George as soon as she reached home. In thinking it over she came to realize the fact that it would be a little awkward for her to explain how she happened to see those photographs when they were supposed to be put away secretly. It was different telling her cousin about them. Emma did not live in Newcomb, and it was not necessary to go into details.

But it was not in her nature to keep such a thing to herself. First, under strict injunctions to secrecy, she told Mrs. Robbins about it, and then, a day or two later, confided the matter to Mrs. Mason.

"There, I always knew there was a mystery about Mr. Hartfield!" exclaimed the former. "I think it was a mercy, Caroline, that you happened to see that photograph. What do you suppose we ought to do about it? It's plain he must think a lot of that woman, and he engaged to another one! Not that I pity that Kingsbury girl so much, but it's sure to bring scandal on the church in the end. I wish you could have had a talk with the woman. You are sure it was the same one?"

"I thought it was, but Emma and Bartley were certain it couldn't be. I'd just like to see her and the minister together, though."

Mrs. Mason strongly advocated aggressive measures.

"Some one ought to go to Mr. Hartfield and ask him right out to explain the thing," she affirmed. But as no one was willing to go as far as this—she added she'd do it herself only she wasn't a member of the church—things seemed likely to remain just as they were till one afternoon the three met at the bakery and Mrs. Robbins suggested that they all adjourn to her house and give the matter thorough discussion.

The result of this symposium was the determination to write an anonymous letter to Mrs. Westerman. This was Mrs. Mason's idea.

"It's safer to write to her than to the minister," she explained. "She don't know anybody here and will never suspect who it's from."

"But what shall we say in it?" Mrs. Robbins wanted to know. She rose as she spoke and went over to close the door so that there would be no possibility of Dora overhearing the proceedings.

"Why, just tell her how the thing stands," replied Miss Tagford, who seized on the idea with enthusiasm. "If nothin' comes of it we'll know she ain't the right one, and there's no harm done."

"Who'll write it?" was Mrs. Robbins' next question.

"Oh, that doesn't matter. There won't be any name to it, so it's no odds. I'd just as lief as anybody."

"It ought to be sent right off," Miss Tagford interposed. "There's no knowin' how long she'll be up at the hotel."

"I'll write it now if Mrs. Robbins'll get me pen and paper." Mrs. Mason settled her bonnet strings and looked as though she were ready for the martyr's stake in the good cause.

Writing materials were produced, and then, just as the task was about to be begun, a snag was struck.

"How shall I start it?" Mrs. Mason inquired. "I don't like to say 'Dear Mrs. Westerman.' She must be a shameless creature from all Caroline tells us."

"You might put it 'Dear Madame,'" Mrs. Robbins suggested.

"No, I don't want to have any 'dear' in it at all. Suppose I put just 'Mrs. Westerman' at the top?" Mrs. Mason stuck the end of the penholder in her mouth and looked at her two coadjutors.

"Yes, that'll do," returned Miss Tagford. "It's plenty good enough for her. Now go on and say 'A friend would like to tell you——'"

"But I ain't her friend," broke in Mrs. Mason. "An' I don't want to be."

"What's the good of saying anything like that, anyway?" interposed Mrs. Robbins. "Just go right in and tell what we want to without any leading up to it."

Once more Mrs. Mason put pen to paper, but she made no mark.

"Let's see," she said, "what is it we want to tell her?"

"Why, that the Rev. John Hartfield, a man she once knew, is living in this town, and is engaged to be married. If he's bound to her in any way she'll know what to do then." So spoke Miss Tagford and Mrs. Mason wrote accordingly.

"Would you say who he was engaged to?" she asked, when she was half way through.

"No, there isn't any good of doing that," spoke up Mrs. Robbins. "She'll find it out quick enough if she comes here after him."

"You don't think she'll do that, do you?" exclaimed Mrs. Mason, dropping her pen and looking a little frightened.

"She may," responded Miss Tagford. She secretly hoped she would. It would be a pity, she felt, to have all this excitement end in nothing at all.

On hearing this Mrs. Mason was disinclined to do any more work on the letter. But all that was needed now was to address the envelope.

"I'd do that myself," said Miss Tagford, "but Bartley Dunham knows my writin'. Suppose you do it, Mrs. Robbins?"

After some demur Mrs. Robbins consented, and then Miss Tagford offered to mail it, which she did on her way home. This was on Tuesday; when the three met at church the following Sunday they exchanged significant glances, but did not dare have much to say to one another. They all paid strict attention to the preacher, striving to note if there was any change in

his demeanor which would indicate a shock to his nervous system. But they could perceive none.

"Guess it couldn't been the same woman, Caroline," Mrs. Robbins whispered cautiously, as they met near the gate.

"Maybe she's gone away an' they had to send the letter on after her. Just wait a while."

On Wednesday of this week the stage belonging to the Imperial Hotel rattled back from the 12:03 train with a passenger inside. Mr. Midwin, the proprietor, who was dozing on the front porch over a day old newspaper, rubbed his eyes and looked again when he beheld old black Tom backing the horses around to the stepping stone in front of the ladies' entrance. As a rule nothing ever came back in the noon stage but the mail bag.

Guests often went away by the train it met. However, it always seemed that more guests were leaving the Imperial than ever arrived at it. It was one of the standing Newcomb mysteries how this could be.

Mr. Midwin was on his feet in an instant, but he nearly lost them again in astonishment when, holding the door open for his guest to descend, he beheld the lady. She was dressed in black, but the waist of her gown was more like a man's jacket than Mr. Midwin had ever seen on woman before. This parted at the breast, revealing underneath the unmistakable shirt of the gentleman, topped by a stand up collar, the latter encircled by a black tie fastened in four in hand style. The "tailor made girl" was as yet an unknown quantity in Newcomb. Mr. Midwin was at first undecided whether to bow down and worship, or close the stage door and tell Tom to drive back to the station as fast as he could. The sight of the glittering stones in the woman's ears reassured him. This was surely a feminine trait. He put out his hand and assisted the stranger to alight.

She was a handsome woman, apparently about thirty. There was a cold glitter in her eye, however, that Mr. Midwin noted without being exactly able at the time to explain just why he was affected by it as he was.

"This is the Imperial, is it?" The woman took a tortoise shell lorgnette from its position on her girdle and held it up for an instant's survey of the building. "Is this the only hotel in town?" She turned on Mr. Midwin suddenly with the question, surveying him with her glass just as she had surveyed the building.

"No, oh no, ma'am," responded Midwin, who, many of the citizens declared, was entirely too meek to run a hotel successfully. He had inherited the property from his father. "But the Imperial is the leading one."

"Oh, it is the leading one, is it?"

The woman repeated these words as she turned again towards the house with her glass, as though she were seeking from it confirmation of the assertion made by its owner. She dropped the lorgnette suddenly and took a step closer to the landlord.

"Come now," she said in quite a different tone and with a smile that revealed two rows of dazzlingly white teeth, "what will you charge me for a parlor and bedroom for—let me see—say a week?"

Mr. Midwin drew a quick breath. He was quite overwhelmed by the

intimation that she might want to stay with him for a week. His usual guests were commercial travelers, who rarely lingered over a couple of days.

"A parlor and a bedroom, on a lower floor, of course, would cost you twenty dollars for the week. If you will step into the parlor I will bring the register to you."

Mr. Midwin had caught sight of the great Saratoga trunk standing by the driver's seat on the omnibus. It seemed to convince him that there was a reality about the week's stay business. He threw open a door on the piazza that led directly into a small reception room, and stood alongside of it in a deferential attitude till the lady had walked past him and taken a seat inside.

"Umph," she muttered, glancing around her critically and drawing off her gloves with a little toss in the air of each as she freed her fingers of it, "if he's really here it must be a come down for him. Jack Hartfield! Ha, ha!"

She laughed softly, and then got up to walk around the room in a restless fashion. She paused suddenly before one of the windows.

"Who could have sent me that letter?" she murmured. "I wonder—but there! I won't puzzle my head about it any more. I'll take the goods the gods provide, asking no questions. Ah, Jack, I didn't know how much I cared for you till this opportunity of seeing you again was thus unexpectedly made possible. I wonder if you have changed much, if you have many traces of the bonny boy of ten years ago? And a minister now. Ha, ha, ha!"

She laughed aloud this time. Mr. Midwin, coming in with the register, a bottle of ink carried carefully on top of it and a pen behind his ear, was startled almost into dropping his burden by the sound. He deposited the book and the ink quickly on the marble topped center table, then proffered the pen to the lady.

"Oh, yes, you want me to write my name of course," she said.

She sat down, took the pen and was about to begin with a little flourish when she paused. She raised her eyes from the page for an instant and gazed at the ugly pattern of the wall paper reflectively. The hesitation was only for an instant, however. It was not noted by the landlord, whose eyes were fixed on the varied display of rings on the hand of his newly arrived guest.

"There," she exclaimed, and rose with a little sigh of relief.

"Mrs. L. H. Westerman, New York," read Mr. Midwin.

The name had an aristocratic sound. In spite of some odd mannerisms in the woman who bore it, he quickly decided that she was some wealthy widow of fine family in the metropolis. But what could have brought her to Newcomb? However, that was no concern of his at present. He must accept the windfall of fortune and be thankful without seeking to comprehend the various agencies that had raised the breeze creating it.

"When do you have luncheon?"

Mrs. Westerman asked this question as she picked up her chatelaine watch and noted the time.

"Luncheon?" Mr. Midwin repeated the unaccustomed word in order to

gain the opportunity to more thoroughly comprehend it. "Dinner is ready at one," he finally replied.

"Oh, you have supper at night then, I suppose." A frown creased the woman's brow for an instant. "Ah, well," she added, "never mind. Got many people in the house?"

"Not many just at present, madame." Mr. Midwin made this reply in apologetic fashion, as though wishing her to believe that the hot weather accounted for the fact. "Shall I show you to your room?"

"Yes, I'm tired. I shall want to rest before dinner. But no luncheon!" She followed the landlord out of the room, lifting her eyebrows and shrugging her shoulders with an air of resignation.

She made no remark on the rooms when she saw them. She begged that her trunk might be sent up at once.

"If I don't feel able to come down to lun—dinner, I suppose I may have it sent up to me?" she asked as the landlord was about to take his departure.

"Certainly, madame. Twenty five cents extra for meals sent to rooms."

"Yes, I understand that," she replied, "and have you any good claret in the cellar? I shall want a bottle. Your very best, remember."

"Very good," responded the landlord.

Once outside the door he raised his hands above his head, while he shook the latter in silent wonderment.

"She beats all I ever see," he muttered. "Man's clothes, pretty near, an' bottles of wine! Dear, dear, what will Mrs. Midwin say when I tell her?"

But Mrs. Midwin was at this time visiting relatives in a distant part of the State. She was of a much more wide awake nature than her husband. Perhaps if she had been at home Mrs. Westerman might have had a few questions put to her after she had registered.

Tom had to get the assistance of Sam, the second man at the stable, to help him up the stairs with the Saratoga trunk. When they had deposited it in the spot pointed out by its owner, she said:

"I want one of you to come back here in fifteen minutes and take a letter out for me to mail. Remember, in fifteen minutes. I don't see any bell in the room."

"Yes'm," answered Tom, and on the way down stairs he confided to Sam that he thought the newcomer must be the Circassian girl from the circus, married and become respectable.

"Didn't you see what funny yeller hair she had?" he added. "Kind o' whitish. I never seed none like it afore outside de show."

In fifteen minutes by the barroom clock he was back at No. 16. In response to his knock the door was opened to a crack and a white hand passed out a square shaped envelope and a ten cent piece.

"Right away, please," said the voice inside.

"Yes, ma'am, t'ank ye, ma'am."

Tom pocketed the unexpected coin—for the few ladies who chanced to stop at the Imperial were non-tippers—and shambled off towards the post office on the next block at a faster gait than usual.

Half way to his destination, curiosity prompted him to look down at the address on the letter.

"Golly," he exclaimed, "it's agoin' to Mr. Hartfield, the minister. She must be sick an' t'ink she's goin' to die. She did look purty white for a fac'!"

Tom went on and dropped the letter in the slot at the post office. As he turned away he saw Hartfield on the other side of the street. He crossed over and hailed him.

"Massa Hartfield," he said, "there's a letter for you in de offis. I done jess drop it in. You better go over an' get it out fore it gets cold." And elated at the joke he felt he had made Tom hurried back to the hotel.

CHAPTER VII.—THE RETURN OF THE PAST.

HARTFIELD had been to call on Mrs. Brink. The old lady had not been very well; she had been absent from church on Sunday. She was all right again now, however; one of her twinges of rheumatism, she explained to the minister, who enjoyed his visit with her exceedingly.

She had spoken so nicely of Grace. She thought the two just suited to each other, she said, and had been so pleased when she heard of the engagement. Hartfield was set aglow with a sense of his blessings as he came away and walked back toward the parsonage. Grace had promised to name the day for the wedding at some early date in October. The session had offered to grant him leave of absence for a month. He had decided they would go West for their trip.

He was in the upper story of his air castle when black Tom accosted him. He had not intended to stop at the post office then. Letters very seldom came for him in the noon mail. But this was evidently something from somebody in town. Perhaps there was sickness. He stepped across the street and entered the post office.

The Mason carryall stood before the door. Mrs. Mason was on the front seat driving, two of the children and a great bundle of purchases in the rear. Gil Mason was in the office getting the mail.

Hartfield stopped to speak to the wagon load, not omitting to shake hands with the children. They were not particularly attractive youngsters, but then the minister had not failed to profit by the lesson he had learned from his experience with Mrs. Robbins.

"Yes, we're all pretty well, Mr. Hartfield," Mrs. Mason replied to his inquires. "Timothy is kind of dragged down with work on the place, though, gittin' in all the crops. Gilly, look in Mr. Hartfield's box and see if there is a letter for him."

"No'm, there ain't," returned the boy after he had gone in to make an inspection.

"Why, that's odd!" exclaimed Hartfield. "I was just told there was something here for me. Excuse me, Mrs. Mason; perhaps Mr. Brown has misplaced it."

Mrs. Mason glanced after him sharply as he went up the steps into the

office. She did not drive on as soon as Gil got in. She sat there as if trying to think what other errand she had to do before turning the horses' heads homeward. Then she glanced up and saw the minister coming out of the post office, holding a square envelope in front of him, an expression on his face she had never seen there before. But when he noticed that the carriage was still standing there, he slipped the letter into the side pocket of his coat, and said: "It is from town. Mr. Brown hadn't taken it from the basket yet. Good morning, Mrs. Mason."

He lifted his hat and passed on. Mrs. Mason looked after him.

"From town, is it? It can't be the answer then," she said to herself. "But I never saw a man look as much as if he was suffering awful pain."

She slapped the lines on the horses' backs and started homeward, determined to mention the incident to Caroline Tagford the next time she saw her. Hartfield meanwhile walked along the maple shaded main street toward the parsonage. But he seemed not to be really conscious of where he was going. The walking was purely mechanical. He was not sensible of bending his steps in any particular direction. He remembered speaking to Mrs. Mason as he came out of the post office. He wondered now how he could have done it. He hoped he had not said anything out of the way. He had no recollection of what he had said.

He kept one hand over the pocket that held the letter, the letter which he had not yet opened, but the writing on which he had recognized at the first glance. He had never expected to see it again. So many years had elapsed since any communication had passed between him and the writer that he had felt justified in hoping that never again in any way would their paths cross.

"Grace!" The one word escaped him with a sort of shudder. Was it Nemesis on his track, now that he had given himself up to a happiness that he had once thought never could be his?

But it was idle for him to be anticipating evil in this way before he knew anything definitely. Perhaps, after all, the letter was not from *her*. It might be possible that some one else would write a similar hand. There were strange coincidences constantly occurring in the world. He hurried on, reached the parsonage, and going up to the study locked himself in. Then, seated at his desk, he drew the letter from his pocket and slit open the envelope with the silver dagger that lay beside the inkstand.

An odor of violet was diffused about him as he drew out the inclosure. The faint hope with which he had sought to buoy up his spirits faded before that perfume as a flower wilts beneath a scorching sun. For one second he closed his eyes, then squared his shoulders, unfolded the letter and began to read. But when he took in the date line *Imperial Hotel, Newcomb*, he sprang to his feet, with the note crushed together in his hand.

"Here, in this very town!" he muttered.

A black frown gathered on his brow. Righteous indignation chased the sadness out of his eyes. In that moment he looked ready to meet an army. Then came the reaction; he sat down in the chair again, and as he smoothed out the crumpled sheet, he murmured to himself: "Of course she is here. I ought to have known that. Tom told me he had himself posted the letter."

He took the letter up and read it through this time. It was very short ; only a few lines, and ran as follows :

DEAR JACK :

I learned by accident that you were here. I could not resist coming to see you for the sake of old times. I shall expect you to come here and call upon me tonight. If you do not do so I shall feel obliged to present myself at the parsonage of the Rev. John Hartfield, which may not perhaps be so pleasant for him. Affectionately,
LUCILLE.

Once read through, Hartfield placed the note on the desk in front of him, dropped his head on his two hands and proceeded to go over it again, more slowly, with a determination to read what might be concealed behind each sentence. For he knew "Lucille" well. In all these years he had not forgotten those things in which she was master.

"I learned by accident that you were here."

"What accident was that?" he asked himself.

Had she seen his name in one of the religious papers? It seemed highly improbable that she would look there. Had she met some mutual friend of the old days who had told her? But he knew not one of these who was aware of his present whereabouts and occupation. He must leave this still a mystery and go on to the next sentence.

"I could not resist coming to see you for the sake of old times."

Hartfield knew how much sentiment weighed with the writer. There was a settled purpose in her appearance in Newcomb. What was it? Did she know that he was engaged to be married to Grace Kingsbury?

"I shall expect you to come here and call upon me tonight."

This was a command with a threat of some sort concealed behind it. He understood this readily enough without the help of the next sentence, proclaiming the alternative that was presented to him. But the threat itself? What would that be? What hold did she expect to have upon him?

But there was no use in guessing at motives. The question to be decided now was as to whether or not he should go to the Imperial that night.

This was prayer meeting evening and after the service he of course expected to accompany Grace home. He could stop at the hotel after that. This would not be too late for "Lucille."

But to see that woman again! Every nerve in his body revolted from the idea. Suppose he wrote to her and asked her what she wanted of him? But no; this would not answer. She had determined to see him and there were plenty of ways in which she could effect her purpose if he did not permit her to do it in the one she had planned out. It was better that he should go.

Having arrived at this determination, he tore the letter into small pieces, and then with a pair of scissors he clipped them into still smaller bits and dropped them into the scrap basket. The act appeared to remind him of something. He unlocked the drawer where he had placed those two photographs he had looked at the night of his arrival in Newcomb.

He had not taken them out since his engagement. Now he gazed at them for an instant, then glanced toward the fireplace.

"These should have been destroyed long ago," he murmured.

Taking a newspaper from the table he crumpled it into a ball, threw it into the empty fireplace, dropped the pictures on top of it, then drew a match

from the case on the mantelpiece and struck it. He was about to apply it to the paper when, with a sudden impulse, he bent over and snatched up the portrait of himself.

"Even in immolation we shall not be together," he said grimly.

Still holding the rescued picture in his hand, he inserted the match in among the creases of the paper, and the next instant this had burst into flames. He watched the ends of the photograph catch the tongues of fire and curl up as if in mortal anguish; then, when only cinders were left, he placed the picture he held back in the drawer, turned the key on it, and proceeded to pace the floor restlessly till Catharine came to summon him to lunch.

That night even Grace noticed that he was evidently distraught at the meeting. He gave out the wrong hymns twice, and changed a little the order of exercises.

"You are tired, John, aren't you?" she said afterwards. "Working right through the hot weather the way you do is too great a strain on you."

He felt guilty in not telling her the truth, but he had decided that he would not worry her with the affair till it became necessary. But she was a little surprised when he declined to come in when they returned to the cottage.

"I am selfish, though," she said. "You ought to go home and rest. See, I forbid you to change your mind now."

She smiled up at him as she passed quickly in at the gate and shut it between them.

He felt a burning sense of deceit as he turned away, leaving her to suppose that he *had* gone home. For an instant he checked his quick strides, almost determined to turn around and tell her who was in the town. But for the hope that was in his heart that there might yet be a way in which she could be spared the pain of knowing this, he would have done so.

On the way to the hotel he overtook Miss Tagford and Delia Mullins. He heard them talking in suppressed tones after he had bowed and passed them. He supposed they were wondering why he had not stayed at the Kingsburys' a little while. It seemed to him as if he was standing on the very edge of a crater and that the earth beneath his feet might give way at any instant and precipitate him into the seething mass.

A number of the usual hotel loungers were tilted back on the piazza of the Imperial. They appeared to be astonished when Hartfield turned in at the place instead of passing on.

"Good evening, good evening, parson," exclaimed Mr. Midwin, dropping the forelegs of his chair to the floor and getting upon his own.

"Good evening, Mr. Midwin," responded Hartfield. "I called to——"

He came to a sudden pause. The note had been signed simply "Lucille." Whom should he ask for? What name had she given at the hotel?

For one second a chill struck to his soul as he thought of a certain possibility. Then he dismissed it as not according with the purpose of the note. His pause was so brief as to be noticeable only to one who might be looking for it.

"A lady is staying with you," he went on. "She sent to me announcing that she was here."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed the landlord. "Mrs. Westerman. She's in No. 16. I'll show you up myself. Warm weather, we've been having, Mr. Hartfield."

"But we must be pretty near to the end of it now," responded the minister encouragingly.

He hoped Mr. Midwin would not linger till after the door was opened. He could not be certain just how Mrs. Westerman would receive him. He repeated the name under his breath that he might be sure to remember it. He would not call her anything else.

"Thank you, Mr. Midwin. I won't keep you any longer."

He said this quickly as the landlord halted before a room on the next floor and started to double up his knuckles.

"Not at all, not at all. Can't ever find that Tom or Sam when I want 'em, but its easier to do things yourself than to hunt 'em up."

Mr. Midwin walked back toward the stairs again, leaving Hartfield to wish he hadn't been so particular about sending him off that way. He might think it odd and discuss what it might mean with those fellows down stairs on the piazza. But it was too late to undo the thiug now.

He knocked on the door.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE ALTERNATIVE.

"Ah, Jack!"

The words died on the woman's lips. She had started to speak them the instant he had closed the door. Both her hands were outstretched, the mouth shaped into a pouting, pleading position. But Hartfield's hand was outstretched, too, its palm showing toward her who would have greeted him so warmly. There was not a shade of recognition in the eyes with which he looked at her, nothing but the courtesy a gentleman would extend to a stranger in the tones with which he said:

"You sent for me, Mrs. Westerman. What is your wish?"

She stood there looking at him for a moment. She was dressed quietly for her—in black and white.

"Will you be seated?" she said then, motioning toward the sofa.

Hartfield laid his hand on a chair that stood near the table and then, as she sank down on the sofa herself, he seated himself on the chair opposite to her.

"I told you what I wished," she said, "in my note. I wanted to see you, to look at you. It is long since I have had that pleasure. You have improved amazingly."

"You have some business to transact with me, Mrs. Westerman, I believe. What is its nature?"

"Did I say I had any business to transact? I can't remember every word I write, you know. If I was a man and had an office I might keep a—what do you call it?—a copy press, and then I could refer to what I said in my

notes. But that aside, you can't think, Jack, how delighted I am to see you again. It is—let me see—how many years since—since we were in Boston together?"

She paused, as if expecting him to answer, but Hartfield said nothing. He was looking at her steadily, wondering what fascination this woman could ever have exerted over him.

There was silence in the room for half a minute or so. From below, through the open windows, came the monotonous murmur of one voice, some member of the group on the piazza telling a story in which he, the narrator, had figured heroically. Hartfield felt that he was making absolutely no progress. He must get Mrs. Westerman to expose her hand.

He rose and stepped toward the door.

"Where are you going?" she exclaimed, rising and coming towards him.

"I am going home," he answered. "You said you wanted to see me. You have done that. You intimate there is nothing else you want of me."

"But there *is* something else. Oh, Jack, I want you. I did not realize what a mistake I was making when I threw you over. I am free again. Westerman is dead. I come back to you now, ask you to forget the past and—take your wife home with you!"

She made a motion as if to throw herself into his arms. He recoiled a step or two. She sank down on the sofa, her face buried in her hands.

The expression on Hartfield's countenance when she used that term was a study. It was rage, remorse, contempt and horror all combined.

"You have no right to refer to yourself in that way any longer," he replied coldly. "We are nothing to each other now—can never be anything else again."

"Why not?" As if encouraged by his dropping of the dignified tone, the woman now lifted her face and looked eagerly towards him. "We can be married again if you like. I will give up everything that would not make me the fit mate for such a man as you have become, and—you know what a sacrifice that would be for me."

"Never, it can never be!" he broke in. "You are as dead to my heart, I tell you, as if your image had never tainted it."

"Tainted it!" She rose, fire flashing into her eyes, the color rushing up into her temples. "Who begged of me for this defilement, as you call it now? Who swore by all the powers of earth and heaven that he would ever be true to me to the end of time? Do you remember nothing of that, John Hartfield?"

Her voice had risen till, as she pronounced his name, it was shrill almost. In the silence that succeeded the outburst, it was noticeable that there was significant silence also below on the porch. Hartfield stepped over to the windows and closed them. Then he turned and faced his companion again.

"Was it not you who first broke faith with me?" he asked. "I do not deny that I would have given worlds never to have said the words you have just recalled to me. The words themselves I do not deny. But I am not the

man I was when I spoke them. You must see that—see that it is as impossible for me to have any love for you as it would be for me to take off from my life the ten years that have passed since that unfortunate night when I became your husband."

She stood, listening to him, tapping one foot impatiently on the carpet. There was no sign of sorrow in her face now. It was all anger.

"Do you think all this is pleasant for me to hear?" she exclaimed. "To have you say that the intensity with which you hate me now is as fervid as were once your protestations of love."

"You do well to call them protestations," he interjected here, with a bitter smile.

"But doubtless you have loved again," she went on. "Doubtless there is some one in this very town who is occupying the place in your heart that once was mine. Oh, I can see that there is in your face. I have struck the right chord now. You are not married yet! I have taken pains to find out that much. But you are rich still. How much will it be worth to you to have me go away from Newcomb?"

"In your true colors at last. Lucille Rabley."

The expression burst from Hartfield almost impulsively. Then he drew himself up and replied: "It is worth nothing to me. Stay and do your worst."

"Ha, ha, ha! Quite dramatic, upon my word!" She tapped her fan upon her open palm in token of applause. "You haven't forgotten all you learned in your theater going days yet, it appears. But I wonder if you realize what the worst really is, sir."

She opened the fan and glanced over it at him with a menace in her look.

"I don't care what it is," he replied. "It can hurt me no deeper than the consciousness that I had bargained with you for a cowardly exemption."

"Then there is nothing in your past life of which you, the Rev. John Hartfield, are ashamed?"

"Plenty, but not to such an extent that I would be willing to bribe you to silence."

"Then you would go home and sleep just as serenely tonight if you knew I had taken a fancy to Newcomb and had decided to settle down here for a while? Would you, my dear Jack? Of course I would always call you Jack. It would seem strange to do otherwise. And I would attend your church regularly; you can't think how anxious I am to hear you preach. And it would not take me long to become acquainted with the people. And I could tell them such interesting stories of the early life of their pastor. Oh, it would be a delightful summer diversion for me. I declare I am quite reconciled to the loss of whatever sum you might have given me."

Hartfield stood like a statue listening to all this. He knew what it meant. In anticipation he heard about his ears the din of indignation that would be raised. But he must face it; there was nothing else for him to do. To barter with a woman like this one would degrade him to the level from which it had taken him all these years to rise.

But Grace! She would be involved, too. He must think of her as well as of himself. She would be brought face to face with this woman probably. But this did not alter right and wrong. If one bargain were made it might only be the first of a never ending series.

Hartfield picked up his hat from the chair on which he had placed it on entering.

"I think we have finished all business that can be transacted between us," he said, turning toward the other.

"No, not quite all," she replied. "There is still another alternative I will give you, one which I suggested when you first came tonight. Take me to be your wife again and——"

But she saw it was useless to say more. A positive expression of loathing came into his face, and in the pause that ensued he said "Good night," opened the door quickly and went out.

Some of the loungers on the front porch were just starting for home when he passed them. One of them, a young man whom he had now and then noticed at church, stepped up to him and said half hesitatingly, "I'm goin' your way, parson, an' if you don't mind I'd like to walk along with you."

It required Hartfield's entire stock of self control to get out a simple "Certainly." He knew he must keep up, must not allow the inward fire to show itself on the exterior. In this was his only salvation.

His companion began to talk about New York, asking whether the minister would recommend a young man to go there to get a start in life.

"It depends on the fellow's character," Hartfield replied. "If he feels he can resist the temptations that are certain to assail him in a great city, he has certainly a wider prospect for rising, if he can secure an opening, than if he remained in the country."

While he was speaking thus, he was wondering at his own self command, wondering, too, how long it would be before the man at his side would hear what all the town would think of this minister who was now giving him advice. When they parted at the corner of Elm Street the other put out his hand and said: "I won't forget this talk, Mr. Hartfield. I never had much to do with churches or ministers till you came here. I ain't auy too good now, but somehow you don't seem like the others. You don't make religion a womanish thing. I'm comin' to hear you more'n I have done."

When he had gone, Hartfield wished they could have remained in company longer. He dreaded confronting the problem of the future. He recalled what that woman had said about how his sleep would be disturbed that night.

"But I have done right," he argued now. "There is nothing to regret that I did not regret before—except her coming here—and that was an exigency for which I should have been prepared. But Grace must be told in the morning. She must not hear it first from other sources."

He slept better that night than he had expected to, but Catharine was concerned about the smallness of the breakfast he ate.

"Love can't be good for a man," she told herself, as she watched him walk down the path to the gate about nine o'clock.

He met Grace just as she was leaving the cottage to go to market.

"Come back into the house," he said. "I have something I must tell your mother and yourself at once."

"I knew you were worried last night, John. I saw it in your face."

"Can you not guess what it is, my dear?"

They had reached the sitting room and Grace had called her mother. In a few words Hartfield told them what had occurred, feeling as though he were inflicting a knife wound as he did so. But they bore it bravely and each approved the stand he had taken.

Then they sat there and talked it over as though it were some material calamity which was sure to fall upon them at some specified time and from which there was no escape.

"Don't fear for me, John," said Grace. "I can bear it—for your sake. It may not be for long. The storm may spend itself in the first outburst."

But that was the fuller horror of the thing. There was only one certainty about it, that it was bound to come. But when the blow would fall or how, not one of them could tell.

CHAPTER IX.—THE ORCHARD INTERVIEW.

LET us go back to the Imperial Hotel on that Wednesday evening. When Mr. Midwin returned to his seat on the porch, after showing Hartfield to Mrs. Westerman's room, one of the loungers remarked, as he shifted his body to an easier position, "You don't often have a call from the minister, do you, Midwin?"

"Well, he's been here to see me once," answered the landlord. "I ain't much of a hand to go to church. But Lavinia, she likes him, though she was brought up a Moravian. There ain't any church of that sect in this town, so she got to goin' to hear Hartfield an' takin' me with her."

"Your wife's away now, ain't she, Ike?" remarked another of the men.

"Yes, gone to see her folks."

"Then the minister must have called to see somebody you've got stayin' in the house," added the first speaker quickly.

"So he did; a Mrs. Westerman from New York. She sent for him to come."

"She ain't sick, is she, and wantin' spiritual consolation?" observed Seth Milford.

"I guess she's pretty healthy," laughed the landlord in reply. Then, in one of those whispers which everybody is expected to listen to, he put his hand at one side of his mouth and added: "She drank a pint bottle of claret for her dinner."

"She did! Ha, ha, and then sent for the minister."

There was a general laugh, and then Mr. Milford volunteered to relate a story of an experience of his in the war which speaking of claret reminded him of. Just why it should, except that claret was the color of blood, not one of those present quite understood. But then Seth Milford was ready with a story on the slightest provocation, and the talk was effectually switched off from the minister and his affairs till the sudden sound of a

woman's voice, raised to shrill tones, came floating down from the floor above.

"They seem to be havin' high words up there, Midwin," remarked Alec Rodney. "Is that the lady Hartfield's calling on?"

"It must be," responded the landlord. "That's where her room is."

Then they heard the window put down.

"Kind o' queer, don't you think?" commented Seth Milford, looking around from one to the other of his companions, ready to enlarge upon this new topic at the first sign of encouragement from any quarter.

"What sort of a woman is she, Midwin?" inquired Mr. Rodney. "Young?"

"Well, I should call her so, and a stunner in dress, if to fix herself up like a man makes a thing stunning. 'Tis kind o' queer, come to think, a person like her should send for the minister."

"Maybe she's some kin to him," suggested Andrew Macy, the young man who afterwards walked away with Hartfield.

"No, that can't be," rejoined Milford. "She'd go straight to his house if she was. An' you say she drank a bottle of champagne for her dinner, Midwin?"

"Claret, Seth, a pint bottle of claret."

"Well, 'twas wine anyway, that's scandalous enough for a lone woman to be drinking. An' they tell me the minister's engaged?"

"Yes, to the Kingsbury girl."

"Queer, very queer." Seth Milford shook his head slowly from side to side with the air of a sage.

"Oh, I guess it's all right." The landlord was not anxious to have any sort of scandal associated with his house. But tongues had been set wagging and the next day it was whispered from one to the other in the town that a loud looking woman was staying at the Imperial Hotel, that the minister had called on her after prayer meeting, that the two had drank a bottle of wine between them and had then quarreled in most unseemly fashion.

This was the report Mrs. Deacon Porter heard when she went to market Thursday morning, and which she gave to her husband at the dinner table.

"Lies, Emmeline, every one of them, lies!" he declared, bringing his fist heavily down on the cloth. "The gossips have been after that man ever since he's been here. You told 'em you didn't believe it, didn't you?"

"I told 'em I didn't see how it could be, but there's Delia Mullins I saw at meeting last night, don't you remember her tellin' us how she'd seen an over dressed woman get into the Imperial 'bus down at the station?"

"Well, what if she'd seen fifty women get into fifty 'buses, does that make it out that the minister went to see 'em all and got drunk?"

"Fie, fie, Richard, nobody says that about him."

"They might as well, they might as well, Emmeline. Now mind, don't you circulate that report a house further. I'm going to investigate it myself."

"How? Don't do anything rash, Richard."

"Rash? Nothing can be rasher than to let scandals like this about our minister go on worming their way like a serpent through the town."

"But what can you do?"

"I can start another story sayin' there isn't a word of truth in the whole business, can't I?"

Mrs. Porter smiled sadly.

"Yes, Richard, you can start it, but it won't go twenty rods. Besides, you've got to have some proof."

"Proof? I don't see as these other parties were particular about that. But I can get all the proof I want fast enough. I'm goin' down to the parsonage now to ask Hartfield himself about the whole matter."

"Oh, Richard, you'd better not do that! You might embarrass the poor man."

"Embarrass him? Look here, Emmeline, I half believe you think there's some truth in this story. Bein' with that Tagford woman so much in the sewin' circle has depraved you."

"Well, well, I may be wrong in thinkin' Mr. Hartfield won't like your comin'. Perhaps you'd better go after all. Your own mind will be relieved, anyway."

So when he was through his dinner, the deacon put on his hat and marched off through the hot sun to the parsonage. Catharine told him he would find Hartfield down in the orchard, where he sometimes walked when he was thinking out his sermons. Thither the deacon betook himself, deciding that the errand upon which he had come was of sufficient importance to justify this interruption of sermon manufacture.

"I just want to bother you for one minute, parson," he said, as they shook hands. "No, no," he added as the other proposed that they go up to the house, where the deacon could be entertained more comfortably. "I can say what I want to say here as well as anywhere."

But now that he was face to face with the minister, the latter's eyes looking at him searchingly, Mr. Porter found the task he had set himself not such a simple one as he had expected.

"I told Mrs. P. I was comin' straight to you about it," he began, rubbing and rubbing away at an apple he had picked up. "An' I don't want you to think, Mr. Hartfield, I do this because I believe the story myself. I don't. It's only that I want your own words to help me nail it as the black falsehood it's sure to be."

"Yes, I understand perfectly, Deacon Porter."

Hartfield wondered if his voice sounded as dry as it felt. With all the determination he could muster he kept his eyes fixed on the speaker, who now went on:

"I don't know whether you've heard what they're sayin' or not, but it's right that you should, though maybe there's some would think it queer for me to tell you."

The deacon paused here, paused for so long that Hartfield felt impelled to say:

"What is it they are telling about me?"

The deacon had evidently made up his mind to make a bold plunge and have it over with.

"Why, they say you went around to the Imperial Hotel last night after meetin' to see some woman that's come there, an' that you an' she drank a lot of wine together an' then got to quarrelin'. I said at once there wasn't a word of truth in it. How do you suppose the story ever got on its legs, Mr. Hartfield?"

"Probably because I did go to make a call at the hotel last night."

The minister made this reply in a steady voice, but it cost him an effort not to flinch under the startled look that appeared on the deacon's face.

"You was there, then?" exclaimed the old man. "Well, I suppose that's what gave ground for the story," he added after an instant. "But of course it was just a call in the line of your duty. You didn't drink any wine?"

"No, I didn't drink any wine."

Hartfield forced himself to smile as he made this response.

"I suppose this woman was took sick at the hotel and sent for you?" the deacon went on.

"No, she wasn't ill, but she sent for me. She was—some one I had known before I came here."

"Oh yes, a friend of yours. Perfectly natural that you should go to see her. That just shows how they make up these stories out of nothing at all. Of course there wasn't any high words between you? You'll excuse me askin' this, parson, but you see I've undertaken to clear this thing up. You parted the best of friends?"

"I can't say yes to that, Deacon Porter."

Hartfield put out his arm and laid his hand against the apple tree under which they were standing. His fingers seemed to be making an effort to encircle the trunk. The deacon did not try to conceal the amazement this answer caused him. He dropped the apple he had been holding and exclaimed:

"Then you did have some words?"

"I wouldn't describe it in just that way. The lady and I failed to agree on a certain matter, that was all."

Deacon Porter began to look excessively uncomfortable. He shifted from one foot to the other, and finally stooped over to pick up the apple he had dropped. When he had straightened up again, he remarked:

"And this lady you say is a friend of yours?"

"I said she was some one whom I used to know."

"Well, Mr. Hartfield, I won't keep you any longer. I'm much obliged for what you have told me. Good afternoon."

The deacon turned away and began threading his course among the trees back to the kitchen garden and so out to the path that skirted the house and led to the front gate. Hartfield stood and watched him till he disappeared from view.

"He forgot to shake hands," he mused. "He acted almost as if I had struck him. I wonder if I should have told him all. But they will know soon enough at this rate; they will all know."

The deacon meanwhile was walking back home as if in a daze.

"He went there to see this woman," he was saying to himself, "and they

quarreled. An' he won't say she was a friend of his, but just somebody he used to know."

When he reached his own gate he observed carefully the front of the house to note if his wife was at any of the windows. He did not feel that he could go to her just yet with his report. He wanted more time to think it over. But there was a letter in the dining room he wanted to post on his way to the store. He went in quietly to get it from the mantelpiece.

"Well, Richard, did you see the minister?"

Mrs. Porter suddenly opened the other door and came in from the kitchen. The deacon started.

"Yes, I saw him, Emmeline," he replied. "Nothin' you want me to bring up from down street tonight, is there?"

He had slipped the letter in his coat pocket and turned to go out again.

"No, I'm going down myself when it gets cooler. But what did Mr. Hartfield say?"

Mrs. Porter was putting the silver back on the sideboard, but she placed each article down carefully that she might not lose anything of her husband's answer. The deacon took off his glasses, wiped them, and then, while he blew gently on each eyepiece, and then held it up against the light preparatory to giving it another polish, sat down on a chair next the door.

"Emmeline," he said slowly, "Mr. Hartfield was at the hotel last night and did have some words with that woman."

"He told you that himself, Richard?"

"Yes, he told me himself. But there wasn't any wine drinking. That part wasn't true."

"And the woman? Who was she?"

Mrs. Porter sank into a chair on the other side of the room.

"Some one he used to know. That's all he told me."

"Well, it may be all right, Richard. You know often things come up that you can't explain to other folks. And a minister has as much right to have his private affairs as the rest of us."

"No, he ain't, Emmeline, not just like the rest of us in a case o' this kind. He's a man set up for our example, an' I don't mind sayin' to you—mind, to you only, Emmeline"—the deacon lowered his voice impressively—"that I was terribly cast down when Mr. Hartfield didn't deny that there had been words between him an' that woman."

"But there might have been a good reason for his quarrelin', Richard." The positions of this husband and wife were reversed; it was now the woman who was standing up for the pastor.

"Then why didn't he give it to me, Emmeline, then why didn't he give it to me?"

The deacon rose as he spoke and without another word left the house.

CHAPTER X.—THE WHOLE STORY.

MISS TAGFORD was all aglow with excitement. The report about Hartfield's call at the hotel had reached her ears and she felt at once that the

anonymous letter had borne its fruit. But she dared not say much; she only went about more than usual and picked up gossip wherever she could get it. Then she made it in her way to pass the Imperial Hotel every time she went down the street. But not once did she obtain a glimpse of the woman she hoped to see.

On Sunday, however, she had her great day. The service had begun and they had reached the second hymn when Sexton Briggs came up the aisle and showed a woman into a seat two pews in front of the spinster. The latter obtained only a side glimpse of her face, but this was sufficient to tell her that it was the woman she had seen at Lake George.

Miss Tagford glanced quickly at the minister, but his face showed no change. His sermon that morning was one of the strongest he had ever preached. The woman who had come in late kept her eyes fixed on him steadily. She was sitting with the Brinks, and when the congregation was dismissed she turned to Mrs. Brink and thanked her for the use of the pew. Miss Tagford, inventing an excuse to speak to the elder, hurried forward in time to hear this.

"I hope you enjoyed the service," rejoined Mrs. Brink, giving one hand to Miss Tagford as she spoke.

"Oh, I did very much," said Mrs. Westerman effusively. "You see I used to know Mr. Hartfield and so I was very anxious to hear him preach."

"You used to know Mr. Hartfield!" exclaimed Mrs. Brink, who had not for a moment connected the woman before her with the one about whom the reports were circulated. "Then of course you must want to speak to him. He will be so glad to see you. There, he is coming this way with my husband now."

Miss Tagford could scarcely contain herself for the excitement that possessed her. Exactly what she expected to take place she really could not have told, but she knew she was greatly disappointed when Mr. Hartfield suddenly left Elder Brink and went over to the other side of the church to join Miss Kingsbury and her mother. Two or three of the ladies came up at this moment to talk with Mrs. Brink, and they all began to move down the aisle toward the door. And Miss Tagford contrived it that she should be next to the stranger.

"Do you live in Newcomb?" she began.

"Oh, no, I'm just staying here for a few days at the hotel."

"You were at Lake George, weren't you?" went on Miss Tagford, with the little air of importance she always assumed when mentioning her summer trip. "I think I saw you there when I was visiting my cousin."

Mrs. Westerman turned a quick look on her.

"I do not remember you," she said. "Yes, I was there."

She spoke in an indifferent tone and was glancing behind Miss Tagford's back across the church toward the other aisle, down which Hartfield was passing with the Kingsburys. Suddenly she turned to her companion again and asked:

"Is that the young lady to whom Mr. Hartfield is engaged?"

"Yes, that's Miss Kingsbury," responded Miss Tagford eagerly.

"How long have they been engaged?" was the next question.

"About a month. I expect they'll be married before long."

"Has she got money?"

"Oh no, but he's rich, I guess. You ought to know about that, though. I thought I heard you telling Mis' Brink that you used to be acquainted with Mr. Hartfield."

"Yes, I used to be *acquainted with him*. And he had money, too. His family were rich."

"His family? We don't know anything about them. He never told us much. He ain't been here long."

By this time they had reached the vestibule, which presented a very sociable scene, with much hand shaking and a general exchange of "Good mornings." Mrs. Robbins came up behind Miss Tagford and pulled her by the sleeve. In the instant that the spinster turned to see who wanted her, Mrs. Westerman made her way out through the crowd, and raising her conspicuous black and white parasol, strolled slowly off in the direction of the hotel.

"There she is; that's the woman he went to see at the Imperial," was whispered about, and for an instant or two a silence fell on the vestibule.

Then the talk was resumed, but in a lowered tone. Mr. Hartfield was passing out with the Kingsburys. He bowed and spoke in a pleasant way to those about him, but there was a difference in their manner of greeting him. He could not but perceive that.

Mrs. Robbins meanwhile was eagerly whispering with Miss Tagford.

"Was that the woman? A bold looking creature, I must say. Do you really think that letter brought her here?"

"Of course it did. She used to know the minister real well. She told me so."

"What do you suppose there is between them?"

"I can't quite make out yet. But he didn't seem to want to speak to her just now in church."

"Well, I think a committee ought to be appointed to wait on the minister and make him explain. It's scandalous to have things going on this way."

"What way?" Delia Mullins came up at this minute and wanted to know.

"Why, the mystery there is about Mr. Hartfield an' that woman who's stayin' at the hotel," Miss Tagford made haste to answer. "'Taint possible you ain't heard about it, Delia?"

"Oh, I've heard some whispering, but I haven't placed any dependence on it."

"You haven't? Why, what can you be thinking of, Delia Mullins?" Do you mean to say you believe it's right for a man that's a minister and an engaged one at that to go to a hotel late at night and drink wine and quarrel with a strange woman?"

"I don't believe he did it," replied Miss Mullins firmly.

"Of course he did it," persisted Mrs. Robbins. "The whole town knows about it. Go to the hotel and ask Mr. Midwin. He'll tell you."

"Are you talking about the minister?" said Mrs. Mason, joining herself to the group. "I must tell you what I saw Wednesday morning."

"What you saw, Mis' Mañon?" Miss Tagford broke in almost breathlessly. "What was it? Anythin' to do with that woman?"

"I should say it was." Mrs. Mason smiled grimly as she spoke. "I was waiting in the carryall in front of the post office when he got a letter, an' I'm sure it was from her by the way he looked."

"A letter from her!" exclaimed the three listeners in chorus.

"Yes, and you ought to have seen his face when he got it. I don't feel 's if I could sit under his preaching any more till the mystery's cleared up. But there's Timothy waiting with the wagon. I must be going."

Miss Tagford walked off with the Robbinses. Mr. Robbins was a taciturn man, but he had heard the gossip about the minister's call at the hotel, and now, when he found out that Miss Tagford had walked down the aisle with the woman who was staying there, he asked for some particulars about her.

"Is she any relation of Hartfield's?" he inquired.

"That's what we don't know," responded his wife, adding: "I think you, George, as a member of the board of trustees, ought to see that something is done about the matter. What does Deacon Porter say?"

Mr. Robbins and Mr. Porter were in business together.

"Why, I never asked him about it. I never thought to do it. I'll speak to him tomorrow."

The next evening as soon as her husband reached home, "Well, George, did you speak to Deacon Porter about the minister?" Mrs. Robbins asked.

"Yes, the first thing this morning."

"Well, and what does he say?"

"He thinks we'd better appoint a committee to wait on Hartfield and ask him to explain things."

"There, what did I tell you? The very thing I suggested myself. Well, who's going to do it? You know somebody's got to make the first move in a thing of this kind."

"The deacon's going to do it himself. It seems he went to see Hartfield as soon as he heard the reports, and he wasn't quite satisfied with what he found out. The minister denied the wine drinking, but he admitted he went to the hotel and had some words with the woman."

"Well, I hope the committee'll find out who she is and all about her," said Mrs. Robbins. "When are they going to call on him?"

"Tomorrow night."

"But he'll be at the Kingsburys'. He's there every evening when there isn't any meeting."

"But the deacon is going to send him word that we are coming. It's bad business, the whole of it. I wish there was some other way out of it?"

"There isn't. This thing has got to be cleared up for the credit of the church. Only Saturday Mrs. Penterby said to me she'd heard of some strange goings on of our minister. But I should think that Kingsbury girl would feel the worst about it. Remember, George, you are to tell me every word that is said at that meeting tomorrow night."

Mr. Robbins did not promise to do this, and when he set out for the parsonage the following evening his wife impressed the matter on his mind again.

"I wish you could go in my place, Clara," he said.

"I wish I could," she retorted promptly.

But the committee which assembled at Deacon Porter's house, and from there adjourned in a body to the parsonage, was composed only of the more prominent male members of the congregation. There were Elder Brink, Mr. Colgate, Mr. Ranger, Mr. Robbins and the deacon.

They looked as solemn as though starting for a funeral, all except Mr. Colgate, who had a grim expression about his lips, as if the mission on which he was bound was not entirely uncongenial to his taste.

"You're sure he'll be there, deacon?" he remarked, as they walked down Main Street.

"I sent him word yesterday afternoon that we were coming."

"Yes, I know, but did you intimate to him the nature of our business?"

"I think he can't do anything but understand that. I said we were coming to inquire into a certain matter."

"Precisely, and therefore he might think it a good time to be out. I think it would have been better if we could have contrived to surprise him in some way."

"I have no fear but we'll find him, Mr. Colgate," and at this moment they reached the parsonage.

Catharine showed them into the seldom lighted parlor. Mr. Hartfield appeared just as they were taking seats. He gave each one a cordial welcome, but he was somewhat paler than usual.

For a few minutes they talked on indifferent topics, but rather lamely and with a frequent tendency to pauses. One of these was broken by Elder Brink, who was sitting next the minister.

"Mr. Hartfield," he began, speaking so softly that Mr. Colgate edged his chair along the floor a few feet nearer, "I don't know whether you sense the reason we've all come here tonight, but I'm inclined to think you do. You must have heard some of the talk in town about you and—and the woman who came last week to stay at Mr. Midwin's hotel. 'Tain't a pleasant subject to speak about, but because people are speakin' about it an' because we want to stop 'em doing it, we've come here tonight to ask you a few questions."

The old man's tones were very tender, and the eyes with which he looked at the minister were kindly ones. Hartfield glanced around the circle, noted the eager bending forward of each head to catch his reply, and then said: "What have you heard about me and the woman at the hotel? I should like to have you state the particulars before I undertake to reply to them. I know about the wine drinking and the quarrel. Is there anything else you have heard?"

Once more he gazed from one to another composing the group around him. For an instant no one spoke, then Mr. Ranger, looking very uncomfortable, cleared his throat and said:

"I have heard something besides that."

Everybody turned and looked at him. Whatever he had heard it was plain he had not told it to the other members of the committee.

"Well, what was it, Ranger? Speak out; you know that's what we are here for."

This from Mr. Colgate, who was evidently on the *qui vive* of expectancy. Hartfield said nothing. His eyes were fixed steadily on the Sunday school superintendent.

"I don't know as I ought to tell this," went on Mr. Ranger, "because I didn't get it direct. I heard it from a man who was in my office today, and he got it from Seth Milford, who says Mr. Midwin told him."

Once more Mr. Ranger paused. Mr. Colgate shuffled his feet on the floor impatiently and was about to speak when Elder Brink remarked: "Well, Hiram, tell us what it was. Remember you are saying nothing behind the minister's back. He is right here to tell us if it ain't so."

"Well, then, I heard that that woman said she was Mr. Hartfield's wife."

All eyes were immediately removed from the superintendent's face and fastened on the minister's. His were not dropped, but the fingers of one hand that rested on his knee were twitching slightly; very small beads of perspiration were gathering on his forehead. Elder Brink turned slowly toward him.

"Mr. Hartfield," he said, "you've heard what Mr. Ranger tells us."

"Yes, Mr. Brink, I have heard. You expect me to deny it, I suppose. I am not that woman's husband now."

It is not so easy to describe a sensation. The air appears to be surcharged with a quality which defies capture and analysis. So it was in the parsonage parlor. The members of the committee looked at one another helplessly, as it seemed, and without speaking. Even those of them who expected the worst were amazed. Elder Brink, although he was evidently more deeply touched than any of them, was the first to recover himself.

"What do you mean, Mr. Hartfield," he asked, "by your not bein' that woman's husband now? She ain't died since this morning, has she?"

"Not that I have heard of," answered the minister. "I have not been her husband since ten years ago when we were divorced."

"Divorced!" Deacon Porter and Mr. Colgate spoke in a breath.

"And you are about to marry again, Mr. Hartfield?" Elder Brink spoke sternly for him.

"Yes, I am about to marry again."

"Does—does Miss Kingsbury know about this?" asked Deacon Porter.

"She does!" replied Hartfield.

He was surprised at his own calmness, but in his heart there was a feeling of relief that the worst was over.

"But do you believe in the Scriptural sanction of your course, Mr. Hartfield?" Mr. Colgate inquired.

"If you like," answered the minister, "I will tell you the whole story. Indeed, I think it is due to myself that I do tell it to you."

"Yes, Mr. Hartfield," said the elder. "I think you had better tell us everything.

The group settled themselves in fresh positions. Hartfield rose, passed into the dining room adjoining, poured himself out a glass of water, moistened his lips with it, and then returned to his seat.

"I was the only child," he began, speaking in a low, but very distinct tone. "My mother died when I was five years old. My father then concentrated all his hopes on his son. He was very successful in his business, and money being plentiful, I had only to ask, to have all my desires gratified. As I grew to manhood the length of my purse strings drew to me as my companions those who had not the best influence over me. It was not long before my pace became as rapid as theirs. I started to go to college at Columbia, but my father, deeming the influence of metropolitan life not the best for me, removed me to Harvard. I was fond of study, although I still kept up some of my excesses, and having a strong constitution, managed to keep pretty well up in my class, in spite of my late hours.

"It was in my second year that I met Lucille Rabley one night in Boston. She exerted over me a fascination which I could not shake off. Indeed, I did not try to do so. In those days everything was done on impulse. Besides, I was not accustomed to thinking that anything I wanted could be denied me. After a very short acquaintance we were secretly married, only two of my fellow students knowing of the affair. I did not want to leave college before my graduation, so I stayed on till the end of the term. Somehow the matter came to my father's ears. He was very angry, and after the talk he had with me I realized what I had done. Already I had begun to suspect that the woman had made a dupe of me, anxious only for the money I would bring her. As soon as commencement was over my father sent me off to Texas, where he had a large ranch. Meantime the woman made overtures regarding a divorce, which my father managed for me, paying over to her a sum of money, the exact amount of which I never ascertained. She at once married another man, with whom my father learned that she was already on terms of intimacy that justified a divorce."

Hartfield paused for an instant. The men about him were gazing at him with a kind of dazed expression on their faces, seeming scarcely to breathe. He drew a deep breath himself and went on:

"I was only twenty two, but I felt as if I had lived twice that many years. I loathed myself for what I had been, yet knew no way out. For three years I was a cowboy. The wild, outdoor life built me up in health, but I was still restless in mind, a man without a purpose. Then came a letter from my mother's only brother, a minister, proposing that I go to Europe with him. After some consideration I decided to accept, and together we rambled all over the Continent and visited the Holy Land. Constant companionship with a man like my uncle gradually wrought a change in me, a change which resulted in my eventually studying for the ministry and becoming your pastor.

"That woman Lucille Rabley I never saw from the day I parted from her in Boston till Wednesday night, when I went to call upon her at the hotel in

response to a note she sent me. How she learned I was in Newcomb I do not know. Why she came here I will now tell you."

There was a stir of expectancy among the members of the committee. Mr. Colgate was leaning far forward, his mouth and eyes wide open. Mr. Hartfield continued :

"She thought that because I had become a minister I would be willing to bribe her to silence regarding my past. She discovered her mistake. That is why the report got out that we quarreled at the hotel. Need I add that she is nothing to me now? There is my story, gentlemen."

During this narration the expressions on the faces of the minister's hearers was a study. Nothing but sadness was to be seen in the countenance of Elder Brink. Deep seated horror was depicted on the features of Deacon Porter. Mr. Robbins looked incredulous, Hiram Ranger perplexed and Mr. Colgate a trifle triumphant. The latter was the first to break the silence that fell on the room when Mr. Hartfield paused.

"I guess you've forgotten, Mr. Hartfield," he said, "that you're an ordained minister."

Hartfield turned a steady look on Newcomb's leading merchant, but made no reply. Mr. Colgate, feeling that this silence on the part of the enemy was a shame, rather than a glory to himself, the champion of the church, continued :

"What do you suppose will be said about your being a divorced man? What sort of effect do you suppose it will have on the welfare of the church?"

"It's mighty serious business, parson, mighty serious," put in Deacon Porter, shaking his head solemnly from side to side.

"Do you think, gentlemen," replied Hartfield, "that my work here has been hindered because I did not continue to live with that woman I married when a college boy? Do you think I ought to have stayed out of the ministry because I was a divorced man?"

"You oughtn't to have come to Newcomb without letting us know about it," said Mr. Colgate.

"But suppose we leave that out of the question, Mr. Hartfield," interposed Mr. Ranger, "do you think it right for a divorced man to marry again while his first wife is still alive?"

"Under certain circumstances I do think so," answered the minister, "or I would not contemplate it."

"It ain't right, parson," here broke in the deacon. "It ain't right, divorce or no divorce. 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother,' says the good book, 'and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.' There's no gettin' around that, Mr. Brink, is there?"

For reply the elder reverently closed his eyes for an instant and repeated "What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder."

"There!" exclaimed Mr. Colgate, springing to his feet and beginning to walk up and down the floor. "What do you want more than that, parson? There is Scripture on it."

"Along toward the latter part of Matthew," interjected Elder Brink.

"Yes, sir, chapter and verse we can give you, parson," went on the merchant, coming to a halt in front of the minister. "How are you going to get over that?"

"Does it seem as if God had joined me in marriage with this woman?" As the minister made this reply he looked not at Mr. Colgate but at Mr. Brink. He spoke very softly, too, in a tone he sometimes used with great effectiveness in his sermons. "I was but little more than a boy; I thought nothing of the future; did not realize the responsibility I was taking upon myself. And she? She was cool and calculating, triumphing in the fact that she had entrapped a young fool whose money would support her. To be sure, it was a clergyman who performed the ceremony, but he knew nothing of either of us. I sometimes think he was more to blame than I. He was an old man, and must have thought the union a strange one. Yet he never asked questions except such as we were well prepared to answer. He seemed to think that the fact that we had witnesses was sufficient. And such marriages are taking place in our country every day."

"Seems to me, Mr. Hartfield," broke in Mr. Colgate, who had now resumed his seat and was wiping the perspiration from his forehead, "seems to me you're wandering from the subject."

"Pardon me. I was merely endeavoring to point out that, to my mind, that marriage was not really sanctioned by the divine blessing."

"You are certain it was a regular minister who married you, are you, Mr. Hartfield?" inquired Mr. Robbins.

"Yes. I knew him by reputation well."

"You don't seem to properly feel the wickedness of the thing you are about to do, parson." The deacon came out with this in a burst, as if he had been endeavoring to keep in, but could stand it no longer. "No matter if you were divorced fifty times over, you hain't got any right to marry again so long as that first wife is a livin'!"

"Then you think, Deacon Porter," replied the minister, "that I ought to have remained the husband of a woman like Lucille Rabley? Or, that having been separated from her, and having conceived a regard for another, pure as the stars in heaven, I should stifle this because I was once bound to one who could only degrade me?"

"But that one was your own free choice, parson," replied the deacon, leaning forward and putting his finger tips together to rock them gently back and forth. "'As ye sow, ye shall reap.'"

"And the whirlwind, parson," broke in Mr. Colgate. "You will reap the whirlwind. Think what a scandal this second marriage will bring on the church, not here only, but all over the country. Yes, sir, all over the country." In his increasing excitement Mr. Colgate brought his clinched fist heavily down upon his knee. "The newspapers will carry it to the ends of the earth. 'Another minister gone wrong' will be the flaring headline. And right here in Newcomb, too. Have you thought of all this, Mr. Hartfield? Have you thought of the example you will set to the young men of your congregation?"

"Yes, Mr. Hartfield," interposed the Sunday school superintendent, "it would shock people dreadfully. It would be bad enough if you weren't a minister."

"Mr. Ranger," replied Hartfield, "suppose you put yourself in my place for an instant. Take it that you made a foolish marriage, as I did, when you were very young; were legally separated from the woman as I have been; then after many years, you met another woman who loved you and whom you loved. Which do you think would be the proper course for you to pursue: To keep that love locked up in your breast, knowing it was there and allowing the suppression of it to embitter all your after life as well as that of another; or to go to that other, tell her all the circumstances and allow her to decide, and then abide by her decision?"

"It would be hard, parson, I admit, to do the first," replied Mr. Ranger, but it would be opening a dangerous gate to do the other."

"It would break into the sanctity of our homes," added the deacon. "What's marriage good for if it ain't to make a man stick to the one wife?"

"It would split the church, parson, if you were to do this thing," exclaimed Mr. Colgate. "Oh no, it wouldn't," he added, quickly correcting himself, "there wouldn't be enough people left in it to split."

Elder Brink rose and looked around for his hat.

"We've done our duty, Mr. Hartfield," he said, "an' it's gettin' late. There ain't no need for me to say I'd given all I've got in this world that this thing shouldn't have come up. I've stood by you from the first, parson. I liked you when I first saw you, but I can't stand by you in this. My wife, she can't stand by you, and she set great store by you, I tell you. My prayer is and hers will be, too, that you'll see things in a different light by morning."

"One moment, Mr. Brink."

Hartfield had risen, too, but he now waved the others back to their seats. "Do I understand that you wish me to tell the lady to whom I am engaged that I cannot marry her?"

"You oughtn't to marry her," retorted Mr. Colgate. "How you get out of it is no concern of ours."

Hartfield's eyes flashed, but he kept his voice to its even tones as he went on:

"Do you think I shall be a worse man, Mr. Brink, for marrying again? Will my usefulness as your pastor be impaired? Suppose this woman, this Lucille Rabley, had not come here, do you imagine that my second marriage would have scandalized you by its results on my life?"

"If we didn't know anythin' about your having a first wife of course we couldn't find fault," replied Mr. Brink.

"Precisely. Then do you think that because the fact of my divorce chances to be made public I ought to be cowardly enough to go back on my word?"

"But you oughtn't to have given that word," said the deacon. "You hadn't no right to say anything to Miss Kingsbury about marryin' till you was sure this Rabley woman was dead."

A frown creased the minister's brow for an instant as Miss Kingsbury's name was mentioned.

"That, Deacon Porter, is a matter for my private determination. I am quite willing to be criticised in my official capacity as your pastor. What I do as a private citizen is a matter between me and my conscience. When a man becomes a clergyman he certainly does not give up the right to judge for himself. I have long since come to a decision in this matter. To alter that decision now, because certain facts have come to light, would, it strikes me, be contemptible. I hope I have made myself understood."

"You couldn't have told us any plainer to mind our own business," blustered Mr. Colgate. "But we'll see, sir, we'll see."

He started toward the door and the rest followed him. But Elder Brink lingered an instant to put his hand on Hartfield's shoulder and look into his face with a slow, silent shake of the head. Then he, too, went out and the next instant the door had shut the minister in alone.

CHAPTER XI.—THE OUTCOME OF IT ALL.

IF the news of Mr. Hartfield's engagement had flown through the town with the speed of electricity, the tidings of his divorce spread with a celerity that defies comparison. Miss Tagford made all haste to call upon her friend, Mrs. Robbins.

"I declare," the spinster remarked, after they had talked it over, "I feel 'most like one o' the great reformers."

"Hush!" Mrs. Robbins cautioned her. "I shan't breathe easy till that woman leaves the town."

"I hear tell they're goin' to make her go. A committee was made up an' went to see Mr. Midwin about it. But I must get home an' write to Emma. If it hadn't been for her askin' me up to see her all this might never have been brought to light."

At this same time Hartfield was at the Kingsburys'.

"John," said Grace, "do you know I sometimes feel as if I was glad this thing has come out. We need never feel that there is anything hid now. And, John?"

Grace paused. The color surged up into her cheeks.

"Yes, Grace, what is it?"

"I have been thinking," she went on, speaking very slowly, "that perhaps if we were not to wait till next month—if we were to be married here, in Newcomb, it would keep anybody from saying that we would have it done somewhere where they didn't know."

"My dear, the very wish that was in my own heart. Mr. Kenwood will marry us, I am sure."

Paul Kenwood was the Baptist minister. He was a few years older than Hartfield, and had been his firm friend from the first moment of their acquaintance. Already since the recent disclosures, he had called at the parsonage and now Hartfield had no hesitation in going to him with his request.

"Yes, I will marry you, Hartfield," he said. "As I told you the other

day, you seem to me to be acting in this matter from a strong personal conviction of right and wrong."

The ceremony took place in Mrs. Kingsbury's parlor on the Monday night following the visit of the committee to the parsonage. There were present only the contracting parties, Mr. Kenwood, Mrs. Kingsbury and a nephew of hers, Ralph Chester, who had come on from Pittsburgh. But no effort was made to keep the matter secret, and when it became known a perfect storm of indignation swept through the town. Poor Mr. Kenwood was caught in the full fury of the blast. His church sent a committee to wait on him with a request for his resignation, and thus it came about that that autumn Newcomb lost two of her clergymen. But Hartfield saw that Kenwood did not suffer because of a service to him. His wedding fee was a check of such generous size that it quite amazed the poor pastor, who had been scarcely able to make both ends meet on his meager salary. He did not want to take it, but Hartfield insisted and promised moreover to keep his friend in sight for the future.

The last service at which the deposed Presbyterian clergyman was to preside was the Wednesday night meeting following the marriage. He came to the lecture room accompanied by his wife. The place was crowded, and a breathless silence reigned after the final hymn had been sung. Then Mr. Hartfield stepped to the edge of the platform, resting his hand on the table by his side.

"For the last time," he began, "I now address you, my people, as your pastor. My resignation, requested by your committee, has been handed in, to take effect after tonight. That I part from you with regret I need not say. The work here has been very near my heart; the workers have been dear to me. In the dark clouds that overhang this separation there is this ray of light: I am not to go because you are dissatisfied with my work. And now it only remains for me to say farewell, and to add that wherever I may be I shall always remember gratefully the good will, the kindly fellowship, the helpful co-operation I received from so many of you during this, my first pastorate."

There were many wet eyes among the auditors at the close of this brief address, and after the benediction had been pronounced several made their way forward to shake hands silently with the man whose course as a minister they could not countenance. Among them were Mrs. Brink, Mrs. Porter, Delia Mullins, and Gil Mason.

"I don't know what we boys will do without you, Mr. Hartfield," he said. "You have done more for us than any——"

"Gilbert," his mother called to him at that instant, "I am waiting for you."

With a hasty good by the boy turned away. Hartfield joined his wife and left the place forever.

* * * * *

In the brilliant May sunshine an aged couple stood in front of a large church situated in one of the leading cities of the West. They were gazing at the notices of services affixed to the stone work.

"John Hartfield, Pastor," read out the man.

"It must be the same one, Myra," he added, turning to his wife. "'John,' and a minister and all,"

"Let's go in a minute, Seth," she said. "The church doors are open."

They turned to the entrance and reached it just as a young woman did so, coming from the other direction.

"Is the church kept open all the time?" asked the man, as the three went in together.

"Oh yes," the stranger replied. "It has been ever since Mr. Hartfield came. He says he wants the people to feel that they can always have a quiet place to go for meditation."

"Has he a large congregation?" inquired the woman who was a stranger. They were lingering in the vestibule before going inside.

"Yes, very large, and we all like him so much. He does more good, the newspapers say, than any pastor in the city. You see there are all kinds in the church, plenty of rich people and lots of poor ones. I'm one of the poor ones," added the speaker with a smile, "but I feel that Mr. Hartfield thinks just as much of me as he does of the rest. We're only afraid we can't keep him. There's a church down in Chicago wants him badly."

The young woman opened the inner door as she spoke the last words and in silence the three entered the great auditorium. There were a number of people sitting in the pews, some with their heads bent forward in the attitude of prayer, others looking steadfastly at the large stained glass window above the pulpit, representing the return of the prodigal. Mr. and Mrs. Brink sat down near the rear and gazed at this with the sunshine bringing out in strong colors all the details of the picture. Then they noticed the reverent demeanor of those about them, who had turned in here for a few minutes to think quietly about themselves. And there was no sound in all the place, only the twittering of some nest building robin that came in through an open window and the hushed murmur of the city's traffic, which only made the stillness inside the more impressive.

"I don't know, Myra," remarked the man, when they reached the street, "I don't know about it, but I sometimes think we were too hard on him; that we hadn't ought to have sent him away."

"It's all a mystery, Seth," returned his wife in a low tone, the sanctity of the place they had left seemingly to be still upon her, "it's all a mystery. An' you know there's that verse 'Judge not.'"

And then the two walked on silently for a while.

George King Whitmore.

THE END.

LOOK WITHIN.

It is enough for me to know
I've follies of my own,
And on my heart the care bestow
And let my friends alone.

D. C. Colesworthy.

IN JEOPARDY FROM DIAMONDS.

A tale of Kimberley and the I. D. B's—The fearful peril of a bridegroom on his wedding trip—Why three persons wish never again to see the most precious of gems.

STYNE VAN VEYS, sent to South Africa by his father—a worthy burgo-master of Rotterdam—to make his fortune, as the initial step thereto, and soon as possible after his arrival in the Orange Free State, married Minna Van Moop, daughter of a wealthy Boer resident in Bloemfontein. Their wedding breakfast was protracted, intermittently, through almost a week, for it is not in Boer nature to abbreviate a good thing. Then a day was spent in deliberate preparation for their contemplated bridal tour, a great journey to the town of Kimberley, where the diamond mines are, full thirty miles away.

Distance is not a mere matter of linear measurement so much as of circumstances. Thirty miles, when one may traverse them within the hour in a comfortable railway carriage, are very little. But thirty miles, when one travels them in a wagon drawn by mules—or worse yet, oxen—under the fierce sun and in the choking dust of South Africa, seem interminable. This dust is so thick and omnipresent that it is quite correct to speak of going “through” the country and of course one sees very little of his surroundings.

In Kimberley the air was a little clearer, sufficiently so, at least, to permit the tourists to realize what a strange new world they had entered, as different as possible in every way from peaceful, quiet and pretty Bloemfontein. The Transvaal Hotel, where Styne and Minna lodged, though one of the most important buildings, had adobe walls for its offices and sitting rooms in front, while the bedrooms in the rear were of galvanized sheet iron. And the huts of the natives seemed to be made of flattened out provision tins, nailed or tied to slender sticks and with their gaudy labels still adorning them. From the popularity of that building material the place obtained its familiar name of “Tin Town.” These were the conditions in Kimberley at the time of which we write.

Styne made haste to free himself from the large portion of the Orange Free State he had brought along and leaving Minna in their room to a more deliberate and careful toilet he went out to the hotel office. By the time she joined him, he was already upon intimately friendly terms with a very ingratiating stranger, a wiry, sharp featured man, whose nasal drawl and pointed goatee were decidedly un-English.

“No, siree,” he replied to Styne’s question. “No Britisher about me. I’m a clear strain, full fledged and dyed in the wool Yankee, from Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and my name’s Elnathan Perkins.”

The young Hollander—who spoke English well, having learned it in

school—was delighted with the man's shrewd observations, practical knowledge, independence and dry humor. He had long wanted to meet a real live Yankee and, now that his wish was realized, was not disappointed in the character his reading had caused him to expect. When Minna appeared he introduced her to his new acquaintance and cordially invited him to accompany them for a stroll through the town.

"Certainly; with pleasure," assented Mr. Perkins. "And I guess I can show you around if anybody can. I've been here long enough to know this place, inside and out, as well as I do my old jack knife. It's a good deal overrated. The word 'diamonds' paints it very gay in most folks' minds and some seem to sort of hold their breath with awe when they speak of the diamond mines. Englishmen are mostly affected that way, I guess. Well, the mines do amount to something, but not so much when you come to compare their output with the sort of figures the United States is accustomed to juggle. The whole yield of the diamond mines last year was only 1,898,430 carats, estimated worth about £2,420,498, or, to put it in plain common sense figures \$11,727,323. And it was a pretty good year for the diamond crop. But what does that amount to, alongside of the American pork mines in the same time? Why, if these diamond mines were in the United States, our politicians would call them 'an infant industry.' "

At this instant, in the dust at his feet, Styne's eye caught the flash of a diamond and uttering an exclamation of exultation, he made a clutch at the prize. But before his fingers reached it, his hand was knocked aside by a prompt kick of the American's foot that almost broke his wrist.

"What did you do that for? What do you mean?" Styne demanded angrily. The sharp momentary pain and resentment had not prevented his making a second attempt to get the stone with the other hand, only to find that active foot planted firmly on it.

"That's all right. Take it easy and come along," replied Mr. Perkins coolly. "It isn't your diamond and you'd better let it alone."

"Why is it not mine? At least until its owner is found. It is lost. I might get a great reward for picking it up."

"Yes, you would. Not of the sort you expect, though. It isn't lost any more than you are so long as you let it alone. Keen eyes are watching it every minute and if you picked it up, the reward you'd most likely get would be fifteen years, at hard labor, as an 'I. D. B.' "

"Fifteen years! Hard labor! 'I. D. B.' What does that mean?"

"Illicit diamond buyer."

"The gentleman tells you truly," interposed Minna, who had not lived all her life in quiet Bloemfontein without at least hearing something of the fierce activities of the little English world so near at hand.

His wife's assurances silenced the young man's arguments, but he still grumbled, "Anyhow, it was not needed you should strike me so hard with your foot."

"Sorry if I hurt you, but had to act quick. It would be better for you to have your hand broken short off, than be sent to that inferno—convict life in Cape Town. I'll post you up on the situation, for I've taken a liking to

you and want to keep you out of harm if I can ; and what I tell you must be kept right handy in your mind for steady use and not packed away in a pigeon hole. With all that can be done to prevent it, the stealing of diamonds from the mines is a big item. Last year, it amounted to £242,000 worth, estimated on the shipments of unregistered diamonds from Cape Town, stolen from the mines and sold to the Illicit Diamond Buyers. But for the market they make, there would be little temptation to steal diamonds among the blacks any way, who have most chances. As it is, the thief gets a little, the receiver of stolen goods gets the stone, and the De Beers Consolidated Mines Company gets left. So the law is merciless on the I. D. B. and merely having in possession a diamond that is not registered and the legitimate purchase of which cannot be clearly traced and proved, is sufficient proof of guilt to insure conviction. A man arrested as an I. D. B. is assumed to be guilty until he proves himself innocent. In 1873 the penalty was twelve months' imprisonment. In 1876, it was made three years and a fine of £500. Soon after, the term of imprisonment was raised to five years and then to fifteen as a maximum, with a fine that may be as high as a thousand pounds."

"If a man 'just finds a little diamond?'"

"Yes ; and maybe if he hasn't even seen one. Half of the fine goes to the informer who causes the arrest. That is inducement enough for a lot of scoundrels to put up jobs for getting diamonds into the hands of innocent persons and then pouncing on them. They lay stones in the street and watch to see some unwary fool pick them up ; slip a stone into a man's pocket or drop it in his room. Then arrest follows. If you had picked up the diamond you saw, within an hour an officer would have found it in your pocket and all you, and we, could have said and sworn to, would not have cleared you from liability to fifteen years on the Breakwater and £1,000 fine."

"Great heavens ! What horrible injustice in a Christian land ! Does not the law punish such 'put up jobs,' as you call it, for entrapping the innocent? "

"No. It is a regular, recognized industry."

"Minna, this is a place of fiends, and fiends' law ! It affrights me ! I wish to leave it at once. I know the mules are weary and night has fallen, but better it is that we go quickly away and outspan on the veldt than remain here. I shall not breathe freely until I am back in the Orange Free State among our honest Boers."

But Minna was reluctant to leave at that hour. Mr. Perkins said he would not be in much danger if he was prudent, and after considerable persuasion Styne submitted to taking his chances until morning when, he vowed, he would surely depart straightway for home.

"How long have you ventured to stay here?" he asked his new found friend.

"About two years."

"And they have played no 'put up jobs' on you?"

"Put up jobs don't work on Yankees and Jews. Why, there are Jews here who are well known I. D. B.'s, but too sharp to be caught. There's

one, Solomon Jacobs, living openly and boldly in the Transvaal Hotel—and a real nice, good hearted old fellow he is, outside his trade—who, there is good reason to believe, gets thousands of pounds worth of diamonds across the border every year; yet, though he has been arrested a score of times, they never could hold him."

Mr. Perkins, though he did not see fit to mention the fact, was one of the most valued detectives in the employ of the De Beers Company, and spoke with full knowledge when he told of the boldness, cunning and success of the Jew, whom he pointed out that evening to the young Hollander. Styne was frankly amazed. Mr. Jacobs was a small man, thin, gentle looking, with a fine, sensitive face and considerably past middle age. Could it be possible, he asked himself in wonder, that one apparently so weak and amiable had the daring to defy the fiends and fiends' law of Kimberley?

The young couple retired early, for not until they were locked in their room did Styne feel himself safe, even for one moment, from some diabolical job to make him out an I. D. B. The night was abominably hot; those iron bedrooms were like ovens; Styne feared to leave the windows open; no air seemed to enter through the transom over the door; and altogether, even without his anxieties, they were very uncomfortable for a newly wedded couple on their bridal tour. But by eleven o'clock weariness at last brought sleep.

An hour later they were rudely awakened by the clamor of voices, tramping of feet, and sounds as of a scuffle in an adjoining room. Styne believed he recognized one of the voices as that of Mr. Jacobs, and he was right. The company's detectives had learned that Solomon was in possession of a lot of "illicit" diamonds, gathered by his secret agents in Kimberley. He expected to run them across the border—only two miles distant—into the Free State. Hoping to catch him "dead to rights" before he got away in the morning, they had planned to surprise him in bed at midnight and search him when he would probably be least prepared for such a visitation.

"It is an outrage!" the little man shrilly protested, while struggling in their hands. "I do not believe you are officers. Help! help! You are robbers! Let me go! Let those clothes alone! Drop that valise! Nothing in it concerns you—if you are not thieves. If you are, my money and watch are under my pillow. You can take them without choking the life out of me."

Surely it was the voice of Elnathan Perkins they heard make reply: "Come now, Solomon, clap the brake on that nimble tongue of yours. You know well enough who we are, and that we're doing nothing but our duty. You know me, and you know Hodgson here, and Moss. This isn't the first time you've played leading man in the sensational drama, 'Troubles of an I. D. B.'"

"But you never found anything on me."

"No. Up to date you have been too smart to be caught, and we admire you for it. But that makes it all the more a matter of professional pride to gather you in, and we'll keep on trying as long as you keep on buying."

"Oh! well, if that is your game, merely perpetrating one of your

customary outrages upon innocent persons to make pretense of earning your salaries, go ahead—search away—and much good may it do you.”

If Styne could have seen, as well as he heard, he would have been amused by the blank look of discomfiture upon the faces of the officers. Even Mr. Jacobs grinned appreciatively as he looked at them. They understood very well that when he invited them to search, he was very sure they would find nothing. No doubt he had heard them coming—stealthily as they had been, until the moment of bursting in his door—and had thrown the diamonds out of the window to an accomplice watching outside. In that case, his resistance had been simply to gain time for the other man to get away.

“All the same,” remarked Perkins, answering the unspoken thoughts of his associates, “it may be a bluff. We had better search him and do it thoroughly.”

They did so, but unavailingly. There was not a diamond even so big as a pin’s head in his room—unless he had swallowed it. All the while, he attacked them with sarcasms, gibes and defiance, for he felt himself safe. They heard him without making reply, but to some extent revenged themselves by taking him away and locking him up in a cell while they planned a further hunt for his accomplice. That a number of valuable diamonds had passed into his possession since nightfall they knew positively. The question was—what had he done with them?

It seemed to Styne, when quiet reigned again, as if lightning had struck very close to him. “Minna,” he said, “much better it would be to lie out on the veldt, with a lion looking on, than remain where such deeds are done.”

“But if the man had diamonds that were stolen?”

“Did you not hear him say he had not? And they found none. Yet they dragged him away to prison!”

“That is true.”

“I am minded to get the mules out and start at once, without waiting for daylight. The moon is good.”

“Might not such an unusual start provoke suspicion that you are carrying off diamonds and so perhaps cause your arrest?”

“Heavens! That horrible idea had not occurred to me, but I perceive it is true. We must remain. Well then, let us sleep.”

But there was to be no more sleep for the young couple that night. Hardly half an hour had elapsed when men came knocking loudly upon Styne’s door, demanding admittance. Hodgson and Moss had evolved the hypothesis that the wary Jew, having scented his danger when they were almost upon him, had thrown his diamonds into some other room, trusting to recover them in the morning, or even electing to abandon them rather than suffer the severe penalty for having them in his possession. And, they reasoned, as he could have had little time to spare, he probably ran no farther than the next room. Search there would clearly be advisable. So, saying nothing to Perkins, of whom the two Englishmen had a professional jealousy, they hurried back to the Transvaal Hotel and to Styne’s door. When told that the young Hollander had ordered his team for a very early hour in the

morning, they very readily readjusted their theory to fit the new facts. "He is Solomon's carrier," they said, "his wife is only a shield to avert suspicion, and he doubtless has the diamonds now."

When Minna was dressed, Styne opened the door and in mingled anger and alarm demanded his visitors' business.

"To arrest you as an I. D. B. and get those diamonds you were going to run across the line in the morning. And you had better give them up at once," replied Hodgson.

Styne almost fainted with horror, but conscious innocence sustained him. "They cannot harm me," he said to himself. "They must find diamonds in my possession, first. The American said so. And I, who have never owned or had in my hand a diamond, even a glass one, am sure they will find none."

But while he was reassuring himself with those reflections and striving to encourage Minna, the men were searching, and presently one of them, uttering a shout of triumph, snatched up some small object from the floor.

It was a little buckskin bag, half full of diamonds.

Tossed through the transom, it had fallen in the room before the couple awoke. Then, when they hastily dressed themselves in the dark, Styne's jacket had accidentally fallen upon it from the back of a chair, so that when found it had the appearance of having been concealed. In vain the amazed and horror stricken young man protested that he knew nothing about it.

"Tell that to the marines," answered Moss, sneeringly. "You had them hidden under your jacket, and if you ain't an I. D. B., there are none. About fifteen years on the Breakwater is what you're safe for."

Minna uttered a shriek and threw herself into her husband's arms.

"I swear to you," cried Styne in a voice of anguish, "by my honorable name, by my father's gray hairs, by my dear wife here, by my hopes of heaven, that I have not known anything of those diamonds, or any others, and all I wish is to get away to Bloemfontein and never see Kimberley, or a diamond again."

"You'll find it a long journey to Bloemfontein by way of Cape Town," grinned Moss.

"Oh, Styne, they must not take you away from me. It will kill me," sobbed Minna, embracing him.

"Break away there," cried Hodgson, jocosely; "we have no time to waste. Get your hat and come along, young man."

"Oh, sir," pleaded the young wife. "He is innocent, indeed he is. You will do a cruel wrong if you arrest him. We only came to see the mines. It is our bridal trip. And he is only a little while from Rotterdam. He knows nothing about diamonds."

"A likely story that," laughed Moss. "A Rotterdamer and not know diamonds! I'd bet my life he is an agent for some big Dutch diamond cutting house. But that's neither here or there now. He had them in possession, and that's enough."

Wretched Minna fell swooning upon the bed. Before she recovered—which was not for a long time, notwithstanding the sympathetic kindness of

Mr. Coustable, manager of the hotel and a couple of ladies who gave their aid—Styne had been led away to prison.

Elnathan Perkins was rather taken aback when told of his comrades' achievements, but that feeling did not last long. "I'm sorry you snaked in that young Dutchman," he said. "I sized him up before he'd been in the town an hour and you're dead wrong. There's no more harm in him than there is in a spring lamb. Why, I saved him from the drop game myself. Jacobs chucked the diamonds in there—I've no doubt of that—but they knew nothing about it. And I think you're both fair minded men enough to help me in a scheme I've got for getting at the plain truth."

So they were, if there were any reasonable grounds to doubt Styue's guilt. They delighted in hunting down the right man, but had no desire to unjustly persecute the wrong one. After some deliberation they gave their assent to Perkins' plan, subject to its approval by the chief of their force, which the Yankee readily obtained.

Solomon Jacobs was kept a close prisoner in his cell all the next day, until late in the afternoon, and allowed to see no one, not even an attorney, who blustered loudly but ineffectively over the violation of his client's rights. Finally Elnathan Perkins strolled through the prison corridor, in front of the old man's cell and was hailed by him with a shrill:

"Hey! See here! You! How much longer am I to be kept here without an examination? Without seeing my counsel! Without even knowing of what I am accused?"

"You'll get all the examination you will want tomorrow," replied the Yankee coldly. "You would have had it today, only the court adjourned early on account of what happened at your partner's trial."

"My partner?" exclaimed the Jew, in a tone of surprised inquiry.

"Yes. Haven't you heard about it yet? I should have thought some one would have told you."

"No. Nobody has told me anything. What is it? Who is my partner?"

"The young Dutchman in the room next yours. The diamonds were found in his possession—136 carats of them—and as it was a clear case they railroaded him this morning."

"They railroaded him!" echoed the old man in a hollow voice.

"Yes. Fifteen years on the Breakwater and £1,000 fine. It was more than he could stand. He has just been married and the idea of being sent away from his young wife all the best years of his life turned his head. When he was sentenced he jerked a pistol out of the belt of an officer standing near him and before he could be seized, shot himself through the head and fell dead, right there in court. And his wife, a right pretty young Boer woman, seeing what he did went crazy and was carried out screaming. The doctors say she will never regain her senses."

After Elnathan ceased speaking, Solomon Jacobs stood as if paralyzed, with a look of unutterable horror in his widely dilated eyes. Then his thin white hands flung above his head, feebly beat the air and with his pale lips working convulsively but making no sound, he tottered backward until he

sank down in a sitting posture on his bench. But in an instant, as if revived by that momentary support, he sprang up, leaped forward to his cell door and shook it with frenzied force, screaming, "I don't believe you! It is a lie! You are trying to madden me with your horrible stories! Such things could not be! It is too infernal to be true!"

Elnathan silently held up before him the buckskin bag, which he, in an instant, recognized. It seemed to overwhelm him with conviction and fascinate him with horror. Slowly he sank down upon his knees, his hair bristling, his teeth chattering and his eyes staring; then his forehead fell forward against the iron grating and he dropped to the floor in a swoon.

Hodgson and Moss, who had been standing near, but out of sight, started forward at the sound of his fall. Perkins restrained them by a gesture, opened the cell door and stepped inside. Gently he lifted the old man, laid him upon the bench, sprinkled water upon his face and so gradually brought him back to consciousness, but in a wildly hysterical condition.

"Murderers!" he shrieked. "Murderers! You have slain an innocent man! God will requite his blood upon you! The lad knew nothing of the stones! And his poor young wife! Oh! It was worse than murder, what you have done to her. The curse of innocent blood is on your diamonds!"

"No," replied Elnathan, in a tone so firm and stern that it arrested the attention of the excited old man and compelled his comprehension; "you murdered him—when you threw the bag into his room. His blood is upon your head!"

"I did it. Oh! Yes. God forgive me! I did it. That is true. It was my fault—but I meant no harm to him. No matter; I did it. Take me out and hang me. I deserve to die for the blood I have caused to be shed. That is just. But Thou, oh! God of my fathers, knowest my heart! Thou, mighty and all wise judge, knowest that blood guiltiness is not upon my soul, though I have slain the innocent."

In his impassioned excitement he incoherently raved supplications, self accusations, pleadings and prayers, while with fingers that writhed like serpents, he clutched and tore at his throat and breast until the garments upon them were rent to tatters.

"Then you admit that the diamonds were yours and that you threw them into the young man's room?" demanded the Yankee, in a hard, insistent voice that pierced and dominated the unhappy man's wandering mind.

"Yes, oh yes. What do I care what I admit now? My life is done. I did not think they would be looked for there. And I knew he was an honest young man, who would give them back to me in the morning. I was wrong to call you murderers. I am the murderer; only I. You are simply bloodhounds. It is your nature to hunt to the death. Questions of innocence or guilt do not trouble you. Do with me what you will. I alone am guilty."

Hodgson and Moss stepped forward while he was speaking. He saw them, but did not heed their presence. He spoke in a high key, rapidly, like a madman, and when he stopped, turned, flung himself face downward upon the bench, with his arms about his head and abandoned himself to a paroxysm of grief.

The three officers went out silently, locking the door behind them, and consulted together in another room.

"My scheme has worked too durned well," said Elnathan Perkins, looking troubled. "I've got the truth out of him, but I'll be consumedly jiggered if I like the state of mind I've put him in and I don't see how to square myself on my necessary lie and ease him up. I never imagined the old fellow had so much heart. He's mighty near crazy and I'm afraid to tell him right out it was a fake story for fear of breaking him up altogether. And I'd hate to do that, for he's white inside, even if he is an I. D. B."

"Right you are," responded Hodgson, "and I'm blamed sorry for him myself, which is more than I ever thought I should be for one of his trade. And any way the deal goes, he is bound to get the worst of the game."

"So he is," assented Perkins. "His confession clears the Dutchman right enough, but it goes against my grain to think of his being a convict all the rest of his life because he had heart enough to forget himself in his feeling for another. And my part in it hurts me. I feel as if I had extorted that confession from him on the rack. Boys! If we can't somehow get him out of this scrape, I shall chuck up this bloodhound business."

The three detectives had a long interview with the local magistrate before he opened court the next morning and the tale they told to him moved his sympathy for the old Jew very strongly. "I would be willing," he said, "to suspend sentence on him as long as he remains away from Kimberley. He has suffered enough. But how is he to be told the truth without the greatest danger to his mind and even his life? He is evidently a man of very sensitive organization. You have assumed an awful responsibility, Mr. Perkins. Do not understand me as censuring your action. I quite approve of it—though I should hardly have ventured to take it myself. But have you thought of any way out of this very disagreeable situation?"

"Yes, sir. And your willingness to suspend sentence on him indefinitely makes it practicable. You will have me detailed to take him to Bloemfontein and bring back his engagement never to return here. We will start tonight, with Van Veys and his wife, who will be released now, I presume?"

"Certainly. There is nothing against them, is there?"

"No; nothiug. They will have to assist me. Jacobs' first relief will be the discovery that the young wife's senses have been restored. His second, that Styne is still alive, with hopes of recovery and that we have him in the wagon, taking him home. The Dutchman will lie on a mattress, with bandages around his head, at the start any way. Before we get to Bloemfontein, I shall have slipped the whole truth into Jacobs' mind."

The Yankee's plan was carried through successfully. Solomon Jacobs not only very willingly gave his pledge that he would never revisit Kimberley, but announced that he had formally and forever abandoned the diamond business. He forgave Mr. Perkins for that lesson of horror, but vowed he could never look at a diamond without painful recollection of it. As for Styne and Minna, they were very sure that they would never again wish to cross the boundary line of the Orange Free State.

J. H. Connelly.

THE BUNKEL MYSTERY.

How the robbery of the rival banks became a matter of strange coincidences—Far reaching and totally unexpected results of an act of gallantry—The battles on Bunkel Island and the frustrating of carefully laid plans.

CHAPTER I.—A GALLANT YOUNG MAN.

LAKE MONTOBAN was very much in the shape of a pair of eyeglasses. On the section of land which projected out into it in the middle was a considerable hill which went by the name of Nosemount; and if the two parts of the lake were the eyes, this elevation certainly answered very well for the nose. On the opposite shore was another point of land, covered with rocky cliffs.

Above and below Nosemount, the lake was five miles wide, but it was only two between the eyes of the glasses, forming a strait or channel. Almost in this channel was Bunkel Island, half a mile from the Nose, as unromantic people called the hill. It contained two acres of rocks, covered with trees where there was soil enough to give them a hold.

Coming through the strait between Bunkel Island and Nosemount, which was about half a mile wide was a small sloop. It contained two young men, one of whom appeared to be instructing the other in the art of sailing a boat. The course was dead to windward, and the sloop was beating through the strait. She had nearly reached a point where she could take a long tack across the broad lake.

"What was that, Andy?" asked the young man at the helm, who was very nicely dressed, though he did not appear to take very good care of his high cost garments.

The young man, who looked as though he might be sixteen years old, was not a little excited, and he had almost allowed the sloop to come up into the wind, when his companion pointed at the shaking mainsail.

"I don't know what it was, Phin, but it sounded like the scream of a woman," replied Andy. "But mind your helm, and we shall soon know what it was."

"It sounded like the scream of a person in distress," added Phin, as he brought the boat to her bearings again. "Perhaps some boat has upset."

"It may be; but if any one needs help, the better you sail the boat the sooner we shall reach him."

"It was a woman; a man or a boy don't give such a yell as that was."

"Whoever it was, the sound came from just the other side of the island, and we shall soon see what the matter is," said Andy, as he looked ahead. "Mind your helm, Phin, you are letting her come to again, and we shall never find out at this rate."

"You needn't blow me up for it," retorted Phin, as he put the helm up.

"All right; I won't say another word," answered Andy, fixing his gaze on the point of the island which concealed from him the person who had given the scream.

The eyes of the one at the tiller were riveted upon the same point, and he was more concerned to ascertain the occasion of the scream than he was to sail the boat properly. As the result of his distracted attention, the mainsail shook, and then rushed over to the port side. Andy did not say a word, but left the skipper to manage things in his own way.

The sloop had reached a point where she was more exposed to the full force of the wind than she had been in the strait, and it was necessary that the skipper should be wide awake. But Phin Barkpool was one of the "lords of creation," and even the winds and the waters ought to obey him, according to his idea. Andy let him have his own way, and neither said nor did anything.

"Why don't you tell me what to do, Andy?" demanded Phin, disgusted at the failure of his own efforts to get the boat into working order again.

"The only thing to do is to give attention to the boat," replied Andy, as he took an oar and brought the bow around so that the sails filled on the former tack.

"Here, Andy; you take the tiller," added Phin, as he rose from his seat.

"Just as you say, Phin," said the other, as he took his place at the helm, and soon had the boat leaping over the little waves.

"I want to know what that scream means, and I was looking out for the woman that gave it," continued Phin, who thought an apology for his failure was necessary.

"You will soon see."

And he did; for Andy gave his whole attention to the working of the sloop, and she almost doubled her speed under his management. After calculating his chances of weathering the point ahead, he tacked. A minute later another sloop came in sight, with a raft in tow.

"There she is!" shouted Phin, boiling over in the excitement of the moment. "There is a girl in her; but what did she scream for?"

"That is more than I know," replied Andy, as he devoted himself to an examination of the craft and those on board of her. "That is the Diana; and the girl must be Di Singerlay."

As the breeze was fresh and fair, the Diana, in spite of the handicap of the raft upon her sailing, had made considerable progress since the fair skipper screamed, and she was now not more than a quarter of a mile from the island. Andy trimmed the sail very carefully, and compelled the Milly, which was the sloop he was sailing, to do her best.

"Help! Help!" came from the Diana, and the appeal was introduced by another ringing scream, which was echoed in the distance by the rocks on Bunkel Island.

"What in the world is the matter with her? She screeches like a wild owl," said Phin.

"It is easy enough too see what the matter is," replied Andy, almost as much excited as his companion, though he still attended carefully to the sailing of the sloop.

"I don't see what she is yelling for," added Phin.

"Do you know who the fellow is at the tiller of the Diana?" asked Andy, controlling his indignation, for that was what now boiled up in his being.

"It looks like Tom Sawder," answered Phin.

"It is Tom Sawder. I can't imagine how he got into that boat, but he is there, and he has taken possession of her," Andy explained to his less perceptive companion. "Di would not let him get into her boat, and she is calling for help."

"Let her call," said Phin, settling back in his place on the cushioned seat of the standing room.

The nicely dressed young man seemed suddenly to have lost all interest in the adventure. Although it required no little effort on his part, he turned his gaze away from the Diana and the raft, and looked with all his might at the summit of Nosemount. It was hard work to do so, but he denied himself the privilege of another glance at the scene which had absorbed all his attention a few minutes before.

"Help! Help!" screamed Diana Singerlay again.

The Milly was now within a hundred feet of the Diana, and the ugly face of Tom Sawder could be distinctly seen; so could the glowing features and even the snapping expression of Di. It was plain enough to Andy Lamb that it was indignation, and not fear, that crimsoned the fair face, and lighted up the dark eyes of the fair skipper.

"Shut up, Di! Don't do that again, or I'll have to bat you," Andy heard Tom say to the indignant maiden.

Andrew Lamb was a plucky and gallant fellow and he was almost as angry as the girl herself when he heard the brutal threat of the hoodlum. Tom Sawder was a fighting character, and Andy was not. Tom boasted that he could whip any fellow of his size in Montoban, and Andy had never been in a fight in his life. But the Lamb boiled with indignation, all the same, and had no unwholesome dread of the Sawder lion.

"I don't want to know anything more about that scrape," said Phin, still gazing at the Nose. "Head her for home now, Andy."

"We are going as close to the wind as we can," replied the helmsman, seeing that his present course would take the Milly between the Diana and Bunkel Island. "We are headed for home as near as we can go."

"Then come about and let her go on the other tack," added Phin, very decidedly.

"Tom Sawder has taken her boat away from Diana," added Andy, suppressing as much as he could his indignation at the outrage, though some of it was apparent in his look, and in his tones.

"I don't care if he has; that's none of my business, and none of yours, either, Andy Lamb," replied Phin groutily, as though he was rather ashamed of the position he had taken. "Come about, I say!"

"Phin, do you really mean to let that girl lose her boat, and be insulted by Tom Sawder?" asked Andy earnestly.

"Of course I do; it's none of my business."

"As much your business as it is mine."

"Well, it's none of your business then!"

"I don't want to leave the young lady in the hands of that fellow," persisted Andy.

"No more talk about it! I told you to come about!" said Phin, in the most emphatic manner.

"I won't do it!" replied Andy, gently but firmly.

"You won't!" exclaimed Phin, springing to his feet.

"No, I will not; it would be mean and disgraceful to leave the girl in the hands of that fellow."

"Do you own this boat, Andy Lamb?" demanded Phin, his face red with anger.

"No, I don't own it, and in two minutes more I will get out of it," answered Andy.

"Do you know whose daughter that girl is?" asked Phin, in a tone that he thought ought to settle matters.

"Of course I do; but because her father and yours are enemies, Di Singerlay ought not to be abused by that villain," replied Andy.

"Give me the tiller;" and Phin sprang forward to take it from his companion.

Andy simply raised his arm to prevent him from doing so.

"Do you mean to take the boat away from me?" demanded Phin, retreating a couple of steps, and looking with astonishment at the son of a poor man who dared to oppose his imperial will.

"By no means, Phin," replied Andy. "I am going to leap on board of the Diana, and then you can take the tiller."

"Do you mean to desert me?" asked Phin.

Andy made no reply, for the Milly was close to the bow of the sloop. Putting the helm down, he made a long spring, and reached the half deck of the Diana.

CHAPTER II.—THE CHAMPION OF THE FAIR SKIPPER.

ANDY had brought the Milly about so that she went aft on the starboard tack, and he made his long leap while her sails were shaking. Phin had nothing to do but meet her with the helm as she headed away from the Diana. If he was disposed to resent the desertion, as he called it, of his companion, it was too late, and he seated himself at the tiller.

Though Phin was not much of a boatman, he knew enough to take the sloop back to Montoban. The fresh breeze soon carried him out of hearing of the Diana. He was vexed, and even angry, at Andy's conduct, though he could not help himself. But he had enough to think about, for the one thing he needed most as a boatman was confidence, and the sloop heeled over when the flaws came in a manner to make him rather nervous.

Andy brought up on the half deck of the Diana. Tom Sawder was at the tiller, and Di Singerlay was seated in the standing room as far as she could get from her brutal companion. Her cheeks still glowed with the indignation which had not subsided, for the hoodlum was still in possession.

"I didn't ask you to come into this boat, Andy Lamb," said Tom, rising in his place and looking rather more belligerent than usual.

"I know you didn't, but Miss Singerlay did," replied Andy, stepping down into the standing room by the side of the fair skipper. "I came at her call, and not yours."

"I'm runnin' this boat jest now, le' me tell you," continued Tom, with a scowl which was intended to produce an impression on the newcomer.

"I know very well that the sloop belongs to Miss Singerlay, and if she wants you to run it, I have nothing to say. But she screamed, and called for help. That is the reason I am here," replied Andy.

"I don't find no fault with your bein' here, 'cause I want you to help me put them boards on Bunkel Island," added Tom, with a coarse grin. "But I want you to know I'm runnin' this boat."

Andy looked at the fair skipper to see if she had objections to the arrangement proposed by the hoodlum.

"He was on that raft, and he shouted half a dozen times for help, and said he should be drowned if I did not save him," said Di, half choked with emotion. "As soon as I took him in, he made me give him the helm. In a word, he took the boat away from me!"

"That's all so; I hain't got a word to say agin' any on't," replied Tom, with another grin, as though he thought his operations were all regular. "I want the boat to get them boards over to Bunkel; then, I'm goin' back home and she can have the boat again."

"But you have stolen the boat from Miss Singerlay, Tom Sawder," protested Andy.

"I don't want no sass, Andy Lamb;" and the fist that was not on the tiller was clenched, as though he meant what he said.

"That's it, Andy; he took the boat away from me; he stole it!" exclaimed Di, her indignation beginning to boil again as she rehearsed the outrage. "I was ready to save him, but I'm not going to be treated in this manner."

"I guess you can't help yourself, Di," added Tom.

"I came on board to assist you, Miss Singerlay, and I will do what you desire," said Andy; but he felt that in making this offer, he was taking a big contract on his hands.

Tom Sawder was both older and heavier than Andy, and he was a thorough bruiser besides, so that the odds seemed to be all against the champion of the fair skipper. But he was old fashioned enough to believe there was a great deal in being on the right side. The wretch had committed an outrage upon a young lady in taking her boat from her, and he had heard the hoodlum threaten to "bat" her if she again called for help.

"I want my boat, and that is all I want," replied Di.

"She can't have it till I git done with it," said Tom.

"This boat don't belong to you, Tom Sawder, and you have no right to use it against the wishes of the owner," continued Andy, as he took a step towards the reprobate.

"I don't want to argy, Andy; you mind your own business," replied Tom, as he seated himself at the side of the tiller; for it did not occur to him that Andy could think of standing up against such a bruiser as he was.

"It is my business to assist this young lady in her trouble, and I shall do it," returned Andy, in his mild way. "She wants her boat, and she shall have it!"

Andy went to the cleat where the rope attached to the raft was made fast, and proceeded to cast it off. Tom sprang to his feet, and appeared to be even more astonished than angry.

"What are you about, Andy Lamb? What are you go'n' to do?" demanded he.

"I am going to cast off this line, and let that raft go adrift," replied Andy, in the same matter of fact tone.

"No, you won't!" roared Tom, thoroughly aroused by this time.

Tom Sawder drew back a step, and then aimed a blow with his fist at the head of the young lady's champion; but Andy was skilled in the art, though he had never had any serious practice with his science, and was ready for him. He had been on his guard and he parried the blow artistically. He realized that it would be useless merely to stand upon the defensive. He did not take fire like a barrel of shavings, but like a keg of gunpowder; and the blow aimed at his head was quite enough to "touch him off."

As he parried the heavy blow of the bruiser with his left hand, he struck with his right, and planted a sledge hammer hit squarely between the two eyes of his opponent. Andy had pounded a bag of sand enough to know how to do it, and to harden his fist for such work. Tom reeled back towards the tiller under the effect of the blow.

But fighting, more than anything else, was his trade, and though he was utterly astonished at the result of the onslaught, his confidence did not desert him. In two seconds he renewed the attack. Andy looked his ground over at a glance, and retreated a step towards Di, ready to enter upon the serious business of the encounter. He had a plan, and he arranged it so that the bruiser should stand near the rail when he made the next assault.

Tom advanced furiously this time, and began to strike out with all his might. Andy got hit, though he fended off most of the blows of his antagonist. He watched his opportunity, and then he rushed on his heavy opponent, with his blood at the boiling point. He rained his blows upon Tom's head and crowded him against the washboard of the boat, just where he wanted him. He made up in elasticity what he lacked in strength, and got in two blows to one of Tom's.

When he had the bruiser in the desired position, he concentrated all his force upon him, and pressed him with all the vigor he could bring upon him. The washboard was the impediment which Tom could not overcome, and as he was crowded against it, he went over backwards into the lake, precisely as Andy had planned the result, if his powers could accomplish it.

Andy looked as though he had "been through the wars," for his face was covered with blood, and where it was not bloody it was red enough to light a match upon. He was almost strangled for the want of breath, for he had exhausted his lungs in the fierce struggle. He seated himself at the tiller, gasping for breath, though he had the presence of mind to put the helm up, and keep the sloop from broaching to, as she was in the act of doing.

Tom Sawder was in the lake, and in no better physical condition than his late antagonist. As the boat went ahead, he seized hold of the craft, and held himself there till he could recover his wind. Andy looked at him, and as he thought he was in a perilous situation, he put the helm down, and checked the headway of the boat.

"Help! help! I can't swim, and I shall be drowned!" gasped Tom.

"You can't play that game again," replied Andy, struggling for breath to utter the words. "Hold on to the raft, and you will be all right."

"I can't hold on!" yelled Tom.

"Then drown!" replied Andy.

However, he did not mean that, for he would have jumped overboard to save the life of the bully if it had been necessary; but he did not intend to have him in the boat again. Neither of the late opponents was disposed to talk, for the want of breath. The Diana lay with her sails shaking, and Tom had no difficulty in keeping on the top of the water after the raft ceased to go ahead.

In five minutes they had recovered their breath, and all of Tom Sawder's bad blood came back to him. His first effort was to secure a better position, and after several trials and much splashing he succeeded in climbing upon the rickety structure.

"You don't fight fair, Andy Lamb!" was the bruiser's first criticism upon the late encounter.

"I don't fight at all when I can help it," responded Andy, very quietly.

"We're go'n' to have this over agin, and fair or foul, I'll lick you within a quarter of an inch of your life," shouted Tom, almost mad enough to cry.

Andy filled away again, and headed for the island.

CHAPTER III.—A REINFORCEMENT OF HOODLUMS.

ANDY LAMB concluded that it was best not to notice the vaporing threats of the bruiser on the raft, which were uttered more for his own consolation than for the benefit of such a foe as his conqueror had proved to be. Tom could not exactly understand how he had been defeated, for such an event had never happened to him before. How a fellow who never fought had beaten him was beyond his comprehension.

"You have had a terrible battle, Andy," said Di, when she had succeeded in quieting her nerves, which had been badly shaken by the savage fight she had witnessed.

"It was rather warm, but there was no avoiding it," answered Andy, with a smile, for he could not help smiling when he looked at her pretty face.

"Are you much hurt, Andy?" she asked, with no little sympathy in her tones and looks.

"Not much, I think. The blood makes a good deal of show; and I may have a pair of black eyes tomorrow, for that fellow hits hard, and is used to this sort of thing."

"But you hit harder than he did, Andy," added Di, with a triumphant expression on her face.

"When I got him against the washboard, he couldn't handle himself. I planned to get him pinched into that position, and that was where I got the advantage," replied Andy.

"I am ever so much obliged to you for what you have done; I am sure there is not another young man in Montoban who would have fought such a battle for me, or for any other young lady," added Di, blushing, and modifying her statement so that it should not be so closely applicable to herself.

"I never was in a fight before, and I never shall be again, if I can help it."

"If I had thought it would have been such a serious matter, I would not have had you engage in it for the world."

"I did not see any way to avoid it."

"I might have submitted," suggested Di.

"Submitted to what?" asked Andy, looking her in the face.

"I mean that I might have let him use the boat," she replied, with another crimson flush.

"I am afraid I should not have had the courage to fight for the boat; I was afraid he would subject you to insult, and even violence, for I heard him threaten to bat you," Andy explained. "He is a bad fellow."

"I know he is; and I had my doubts about taking him into the boat. I would not do it till he said he should be drowned."

By this time the Diana with her tow was within fifty feet of the shore of Bunkel Island. Andy slowly hauled in the main sheet as he put the helm down, until he had brought the raft within a couple of rods of the land.

"Now, Miss Singerlay, if you will take the tiller, I will rid you of your troublesome companion," said Andy, rising from his seat.

"Do you mean yourself, Andy?" asked Di, keeping her seat.

"I meant Tom Sawder," replied Andy, laughing; "but if you find me a troublesome companion, I am willing to leave you, though I don't care about landing on the same island with Tom."

"I did not think that I had any companion but you; and I kept my seat because I did not mean to let you leave me," said Di, with another blush. "But I understand you now, and I will take the tiller."

As Andy vacated his seat for her, he glanced at the shore. A movement there excited his attention. He continued to look, but he could not detect any motion. He was almost sure that he had seen a man pass from behind a stunted savin to the shelter of a mass of rocks. No one lived on the island, and hardly ever did any one land there.

"I am almost certain that I saw a man on the island," said Andy, as he went to the cleat at which the painter of the raft was secured.

"A man? Some one may have landed on the other side," suggested Di, as she looked at the island.

"I have just been entirely around the island with Phineas Barkpool; but we did not see a boat anywhere. Perhaps it was not a man that I saw, though I think it was," replied Andy, as he cast off the painter of the raft.

"What are you go'n' to do now?" demanded Tom Sawder, as Andy threw the painter into the water.

"I understood you to say that you were bound to Bunkel Island. Here you are, and you needn't thank us for towing you where you wanted to go," returned Andy, lightly.

"Are you go'n' to leave me here?"

"That is just what we mean to do."

"How do you think I'm go'n' to git back?"

"We have not considered that question, and we leave you to settle it to suit yourself," said Andy, as the Diana passed out of talking distance of the raft.

"I am exceedingly glad to get rid of the wretch, and I hope I shall never meet him again, especially when you are not near, Andy," said Di, as she looked at the bruiser, who had taken his paddle, and was working the raft to the shore.

"I hope I shall be near if you meet him under such disagreeable circumstances again," added Andy. "But I would give something to know whether or not there is a man on the island."

"With this wind it will not take long to sail around it, and I was going to make that trip if the wind did not blow too hard. We will go now if you like," suggested Di.

Andy did not think it was quite proper for a young lady to sail alone with a young man; but he assented, for his curiosity was excited. Di filled away, and steered for the strait.

By this time the Milly had made some progress in the direction of Montoban, though not more than half as much as she would have made if Andy had remained on board.

Phin Barkpool felt himself very much aggrieved at the course of Andy, not so much because he had deserted him, as he was pleased to call it, as because he had done so to assist the daughter of his father's bitter enemy. The war between the two houses of Singerlay and Barkpool had been carried on for two years in the most relentless manner. It extended to every member of the family, and into the social and business relations of the town.

The Diana had hardly disappeared behind a point of the island before Phin discovered a row boat just ahead of him, containing three young fellows of the hoodlum order. In fact they were the three other members of the quartette of which Tom Sawder was the chief.

"Have you seen Tom Sawder on the lake today, Phin?" asked Bob Rottle, who was in the stern of the boat with the tiller lines in his hand.

"Yes; and he has had an awful time of it," replied the skipper of the Milly, as he came to so that he could tell the hoodlums the news. "There has been a fight."

"A fight!" exclaimed all of them at once, with eager interest, for they were all Tom's true disciples.

"'Twixt who?" demanded Bob Rottle.

"Between Tom and Andy Lamb," answered Phin.

"Then Tom knocked his eyes out of his head," added Josh Boole.

"No, he didn't; Andy knocked him overboard, and then took him to Bunkel;" and Phin told the whole story, as he understood it, and was sorry Tom had not been the victor in the battle.

"Give us a tow, will you, Phin? We are tired of rowing; and you can bet there is going to be another fight down to Bunkel, if Andy Lamb don't run off," said Bob Rottle.

Phin Barkpool had not the slightest objection to seeing Andy thrashed after the events of the day, and he took the painter of the row boat and made it fast to the stern of the Milly. Besides he was afraid of the trio of hoodlums, and it was not prudent to refuse the request. The course was nearly before the wind, and in a short time, the skipper cast off his tow near the spot where Tom had landed. They pulled the rest of the way; but before they reached the rock which served as a wharf, Tom came down to the water.

The chief of the hoodlums wore a leather belt; and when he appeared to his chosen followers on the present occasion, a pair of revolvers were thrust into it on the left hand side, so that he looked something like a walking arsenal. His face was terribly battered by the hard fist of Andy Lamb, though he had washed the blood from it; and this was probably the first time in the current month that he had done such a thing as wash his face.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!" shouted Bob Rottle, as soon as he saw his chief. "Twig the shooters in his belt!"

"My eyes!" cried Buck Fishler.

"Bully for Tom!" added Josh Boole.

"Where have you been all day?" demanded Tom imperiously, as the boat touched the rock. "I thought to see you two hours ago."

"We couldn't get the boat any sooner," replied Bob Rottle, who appeared to be the second in influence in the gang. "I say, Tom, where did you get all them shooters?"

"Ask me no lies, and I'll tell you no questions," replied Tom, facetiously, and with a smile on his battle stained face, for he was pleased to have his inferiors notice his armory.

"But where did you get the shooters?" persisted Bob. "Can't we get some in the same place?"

"No, you can't; these were sent to me as a free gift by my granny, and she hain't no more on 'em."

He certainly had not brought them from Montoban on the raft; and he would certainly have used them if he had had them in his fight with Andy, at least to frighten him. But Tom insisted that where and how he had obtained these weapons should remain a mystery.

"Had a fight and got licked, Phin Barkpool says," continued Bob Rottle, when he gave up the attempt to penetrate the mystery of the revolvers.

"Who says I got licked?" demanded Tom.

"Phin Barkpool says so; and says Andy knocked you into the lake," replied Josh Boole.

"It's a lie! If Phin, or any other feller says that, I'll knock him out of his boots," returned Tom. "My foot slipped, and I fell out of the boat. Andy hain't seen the end on't. I've been waitin' for this boat to finish him. I'll lick Andy till there ain't nothin' left on him; and then I'll chaw him up into sarsingers," concluded Tom, ferociously.

Just then the Diana came in sight, and the boat containing the hoodlums started for her.

Andy Lamb was running into deadly peril, and the odds were heavily against him.

CHAPTER IV.—THE STRATEGY OF TOM SAWDER.

THE Diana had been around Bunkel Island, and Andy Lamb had carefully examined the shore at every point and opening without seeing a boat, or even a raft upon which a person could cross the strait. He had looked in among the trees and rocks as well as he could without discovering a human being.

As no one was likely to be on the island without the means of getting to and from the mainland, he was forced to believe, almost against the evidence of his own senses, that he had been mistaken when he thought he saw a man dodge from the shadow of a tree to the shelter of the rocks.

"I was almost sure that I saw a man on the island," said Andy, as the sloop came in sight of the shore where the encounter with Tom Sawder had taken place. "I saw him move from a tree to the rocks."

"How could he get there without a boat?" asked Di.

"He may have hauled the boat on shore," replied Andy. "But I should have seen it if he had."

"I think you must have been mistaken, Andy," added the fair skipper, with a smile.

"Of course I may have been mistaken, Miss Singerlay, and it looks as though I had been."

"What could any man be doing on the island?"

"That is more than I know. If there is a man there; he is taking a great deal of trouble to conceal himself," added Andy, as he again cast his eyes over all that could be seen of the island.

Though all the evidence was against him, Andy was not satisfied. He felt so sure he had seen a man—not a boy—that he found it very difficult to accept as conclusive the testimony of the facts. Somehow, the island seemed to be quite different from what it had ever been before, for the question he had been considering had involved it in a sort of mystery. If Tom Sawder had not been there, he would have proposed to go on shore and bring the matter to a positive result.

If there was a man there he was concealing himself. Perhaps he was a fugitive from justice, an escaped convict, or a defaulter keeping himself out of sight. Andy was so much interested in the subject that he was tempted to risk another battle with the chief of the hoodlums in order to find out.

"I think you may as well give it up, Andy," said Di, when she saw by his conduct that he was still vexing his spirit with the unsolved problem.

"I don't see that I am likely to make myself any wiser on the subject, and I shall have to give it up," he replied. "But another puzzle has just come up in my mind: Why was Tom Sawder taking those boards to Bunkel Island?"

"I give it up," replied Di, laughing heartily at the spirit of investigation her companion was developing.

"When you picked him up, he was not willing to abandon the raft; and he was going to make me help him get the boards on shore. What is he going to do with them?" continued Andy, so much absorbed in the inquiry that he did not heed the laugh of the fair skipper.

"I supposed he was only using the boards as a raft."

"In that case he would not have taken the trouble to get them to Bunkel, for I have no doubt he stole them," argued Andy.

But Di felt little or no interest in the question which called forth so much activity on the part of her companion, and he said no more, though he did not cease to think of it. By the advice of Andy, the sloop had gone down through the strait and was coming up through the channel, as the narrow and the wide passage were respectively called by the few boatmen on the lake, for there were not more than half a dozen boats of all kinds on the beautiful sheet of water.

The Diana had just come up with the most southerly point of the island, and Andy was on the lookout for the landing rock, hoping the mysterious man would again show himself. The long tack in the course had brought the sloop close to this cape. She had come about, and her course was quite near the rocky shore, and almost parallel with it. In a moment more, the boat would be in position to enable the inquirer to see the landing rock.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!" shouted Bob Rottle, at the tiller lines of the hoodlum boat, and this seemed to be his peculiar war cry.

Tom Sawder had been on the watch for the Diana; and the row boat had been out far enough to enable him to see the sloop standing across the channel. As soon as he got sight of her, he had ordered his lieutenant to back the boat behind the point. The chief of the hoodlums believed that he was a profound strategist as well as the hardest hitter in that latitude.

He was sure that Andy would keep out of his way if he discovered the row boat in season to do so, and he had concealed his gang behind the point, ready to pounce upon his victim as soon as the sloop came near enough to enable him to do so. When the end of the Diana's bowsprit appeared beyond the rocks, Tom had given the order to pull to the two rowers. At this critical moment, the sloop was not more than fifty feet from the point.

"Ah, ha! Ah, ha!" yelled Josh Boole.

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" cried Buck Fishler, for each had his own war cry.

"Now shet up, fellers, and let me do the talkin'!" interposed the chief, as he stood up in the bow of the boat, with one of the revolvers in his hand.

"Punch him with a shot, Tom!" yelled Bob Rottle.

"Shet up, Bob, or I'll punch you," said Tom, turning to look at the disobedient lieutenant. "I want to speak to him, and you make such a racket a feller can't hear hisself think."

"All right; push it through, Tom," replied Bob subsiding.

"I've got you now, Andy Lamb, and I guess we'll finish up!" shouted the chief. "Stop that boat quicker'n lightnin'!"

"What shall we do, Andy?" asked Di Singerlay, when she saw how near the ruffian was to her.

"Put the helm up, and let off the sheets," replied Andy, quietly, and without moving from his seat.

This change of course would not only give the sloop a free wind, so that she could sail faster than when close hauled, but it took the Diana away from the enemy in front. Di was frightened, but she did not lose her head, and effected the change of course in a single instant. The boat felt the change, and darted off at a livelier speed towards the east shore of the lake.

"Stop that boat! Don't you hear me, Andy Lamb?" demanded Tom, when the sloop began to fall off; but as he was no boatman, he did not know what the alteration in the course meant.

"I hear you; I'm not deaf," replied Andy, apparently not at all disturbed by the demonstration of the hoodlums, for he was a thorough boatman, and had perfect confidence in the Diana—in both Dianas, for that matter, for he had been astonished at the skill of the young lady at the helm.

Though circumstances beyond his control had placed Andy in the Barkpool party, he was not prejudiced against the fair skipper on this account. She had been to the high school with him, but he had known her only as a schoolmate, and had hardly ever even spoken to her, or she to him. But she was a skilful boatwoman, and that was enough to excite his admiration even more than her pretty face.

"Stop that boat, I say!" yelled Tom again, more fiercely than before.

"I know you say it," answered Andy, with something of derision in his tones, for the expression was so clumsy and unnautical that he was disgusted with it, apart from its meaning.

"Stop that boat! If you don't mind what I say to you, I'll blow your brains out with my revolver!" shouted Tom, as he flourished the weapon in the air.

"Blow away!" replied Andy, still unmoved.

"But he has a pistol! I am frightened, Andy," added Di.

There was quite a roomy cuddy under the half deck, and Andy suggested that she should retire to this safe place. She did so.

CHAPTER V.—THE BATTLE WITH THE HOODLUMS.

THE cuddy of the Diana had a woollen carpet, and was not encumbered with old rigging, or with anything else. On each side was a seat, quite low, still a full grown person could find head room enough. Di was as courageous as the average young lady, but in an encounter in which firearms were to be used, she believed that absence of body was better than presence of mind.

"I think you had better lie down on the floor, Miss Singerlay, for a ball from the revolver might go through the side of the boat, though I don't think there is much danger of it," said Andy, when the fair skipper had seated herself in the cuddy.

"If there isn't any danger, I don't want to run away," added Di, trying to smile, but it was hard work.

"There is danger, and I think you had better lie down; but not much danger, for the villain is too far off to hit us."

Di yielded to this argument, and reclined on the floor so that her body was below the water line of the sloop. She placed her head near the door and her position was comfortable enough.

"But what are you going to do, Andy?" asked Di, thinking for the first time of the safety of her plucky companion.

"I am going to sail the boat, Miss Singerlay," replied he with a cheerful smile.

"But the wretch will hit you with his revolver," suggested Di, who appeared to be really concerned about him.

"I don't think there is much danger of his hitting anything smaller than Bunkel Island; but if I find I am likely to be shot, I am not too proud to duck my head below the top of the washboard so that he can't see me," replied Andy, laughing. "I can't imagine where the rascal got the revolver, to say nothing of a second one I see in his belt; and I am sure he can have had no practice with the weapon."

"Are you go'u' to stop that boat?" yelled Tom, before the present skipper had made all the arrangements described.

"She won't stop, Thomas! She don't know how to do such a thing," returned Andy.

"I tell you I'm goin' to shoot if you don't stop!" cried Tom, who could not help seeing that the Diana was getting away from him.

"Shoot away!" replied Andy, as he slid off his seat, and gathered himself up on the floor of the standing room.

In this position he could see over the top of the washboard by raising his head, while he easily retained his hold on the tiller. The two hoodlums were pulling with all their might; but they were not skilled in the use of oars, besides being much excited by the savage threats of their great leader, and they did their work very badly.

"I ain't foolin' and if you don't stop I'll put a bullet through your soft head," yelled Tom again. He was evidently disgusted with the weak impression produced by his pistol.

"Put it through!" called Andy, as he looked over the washboard.

The hoodlum had exhausted his patience in his efforts to induce Andy to be alarmed, and raising his weapon he fired it. The skipper of the Diana did not scorn to duck his head, and the report followed his movement.

"None of that!" shouted a voice, the owner of which did not appear to be on the stage of action.

Andy heard the words very distinctly, though as his head was down, he failed to note the direction from which the sound came. The remark

struck his ear just as though it had been uttered by some one in a passing cloud that was scudding over the lake.

"Did you hear that, Miss Singerlay?" asked Andy, turning his head to the door of the cuddy.

"I did not hear anything but the report of the pistol," replied Di. "Did you get hit, Andy?"

"Hit? No; he could not have hit me at this distance, even if he had seen my head. But some one shouted 'None of that!'" replied Andy, looking over the washboard.

"Who could have said it?" asked Di, interested in the fact.

"The voice sounded as though it came out of a cloud; but of course it did not," returned Andy. "Ah, ha! I begin to see through this business a little."

"What do you see?"

"I see Tom looking at the island, and that is where the voice came from. I am sure now that there is a man on the island!" added the skipper, not a little excited to find that his problem had solved itself. "I don't know anything about the man, but he must have lent those two revolvers to that ruffian; yet he did not mean that he should use them or he would not have spoken."

But Tom Sawder had a will and a way of his own. Though he had doubtless supposed that a display of the weapons would be sufficient to frighten his intended victim into submission, he was so mad at their failure to do so that he could not resist the temptation to discharge the one in his hand. He was not satisfied with one shot, and he fired another. When he lowered the weapon, Andy raised his head, and probably his assailant did not know that he had "ducked" at the shot.

"Ain't you go'n' to stop that boat, Andy Lamb?" demanded Tom.

"She don't know how to stop when another boat is after her," replied the skipper.

"If you don't stop you'll get killed!" yelled Tom, more fiercely than ever.

"If I do get killed I'll let you know," replied Andy, ducking his head again when he saw the bloodthirsty hoodlum raise the weapon a second time.

The rascal fired four shots without intermission, which exhausted the barrels of one of his revolvers. Andy raised his head again. He saw that Tom was boiling over with wrath. If he took aim at all, he did not even hit the boat. Andy listened for another warning from the man on the island, but he heard none.

"I hope you are not hurt, Andy," said Di, in trembling tones, for the fusillade had produced its impression on her, if it had not on him.

"Not at all; he did not even hit the mainsail. Don't be a bit frightened, Miss Singerlay. I am sure he can't hit us at this distance. You are in no more danger where you are than you would be in your own father's house," replied Andy, as he glanced at the pugnacious hoodlum.

Tom had taken the other revolver from his belt. When he aimed it at the boat, the skipper ducked again. Shot after shot followed in quick succession,

as the skipper counted the reports. One ball went through the washboard, just forward of Andy's head. A foot further aft would have sent the ball through his head after it had penetrated the board.

Andy sprang to his feet. He glanced at the hole through the washboard. It made him boil over with indignation and anger. The keg of gunpowder in his composition exploded as he looked at it. Possibly he had not been able to believe that the threats of the hoodlum were anything more than talk till the boat was struck by a shot. Tom's actions meant "business" to him now.

Without saying a word to the fair skipper, he put the boat about, and headed her towards the craft of the hoodlums. Andy was mad from the sole of his shoe to the lining of his cap. The blackguard had come within one foot of putting a bullet through his head.

The Diana had been headed to the southeast during Tom's revolver practice, and of course was now in the opposite direction, and she had the wind square on the beam. She was doing her best, as she had not before, because the skipper's attention had been diverted from his duty.

"Did he hit you, Andy?" asked Di, as soon as the skipper resumed his place at the tiller, after he had changed the course of the sloop. "I know he has, for you have been changing the course of the boat."

"No, he did not hit me; but he came within just one foot of sending a bullet through my head," answered Andy, much excited. "You can see where the ball struck the washboard;" and he pointed at the ragged hole.

"But he will kill you, Andy!" almost screamed Di, as she looked at the mark of the ball.

"No, he won't; he has emptied all his barrels, and he can't fire again till he loads them. There is not a bit of danger to you now, Miss Singerlay, and you had better come out of the cuddy," said Andy, struggling to keep his wrath within bounds.

His anger and indignation did not manifest themselves in outward expressions; all the boiling was within his being, though it gave a decided sharpness to his actions. Di seemed to have unlimited confidence in her companion, for she came out of the cuddy, and seated herself in the standing room.

"Why, Andy! you are headed directly towards the rascal's boat!" she exclaimed, as soon as she had looked about her.

"I am; I can't stand this thing any longer, and I'm going to put a stop to it in short meter," replied he, with his teeth set.

The Diana was going at a furious rate; Tom Sawder was yelling. A minute later the sloop struck the row boat, and cut it in two.

CHAPTER VI.—THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER ON BUNKEL ISLAND.

DI SINGERLAY sent forth a scream when the sloop struck the row boat. A young lady could hardly have been expected to do less than this, for it was really a terrible scene. The Diana actually went entirely over the craft and her living freight, carrying the four hoodlums under water.

Andy Lamb was thoroughly in earnest. He had varied the course of the

sloop enough to enable him to hit the boat amidships, and as it was only lightly built, the sharp bow of the sailboat had cut entirely through her.

The two ruffians who were at the oars had only time to abandon their posts, and one of them sprang into the bow, while the other tumbled into the stern sheets. Tom Sawder, who was yelling out his threats of vengeance as though he did not anticipate the impending disaster, was pitched from his standing position over the bow of the boat.

The *Diana* was strongly built, and she dashed on her course, only a little shaken by the shock, as though nothing had happened. Of course Tom and his companions were effectively silenced, and it was a relief to hear their noisy yells no more. Andy stood as stiff as a granite monument at the helm, and did not seem to be at all disturbed by the mischief he had done to the enemy. He looked calmly astern at the havoc he had made, and did not change the course of the sloop.

The row boat contained no ballast, and it did not sink. What was left of it remained floating on the waves after the *Diana* had passed over it. None of the hoodlums had been injured by the collision, and all four of them were in condition to take care of themselves.

All but Tom were in the boat, and they laid hold of the wreck. The rower who had leaped into the stern gave his hand to the chief, and drew him to the boat, so that he got hold of it. Not one of them was in any danger.

The wind had been increasing, and the lake now was lively with white caps. Although the boat had been practically cut in two, the parts did not separate, and it was evident that they were held together by the keel, which had not been broken.

As soon as Andy had satisfied himself that the ruffians were in no danger of perishing in the lake, he directed his attention to the shore of the island. He expected to see there the mysterious individual who had called out to Tom, and who had probably supplied him with his stock of revolvers.

But there was no one to be seen on the island. There was certainly a man there, and as he had observed the actions of Tom when he had the pistol in his hand, he must have seen the disaster to the boat. Andy ran directly for the landing rock, and watched with all his eyes for the appearance of the stranger. The skipper was so much absorbed in this lookout that he failed to make any reply to the remarks of his fair companion.

The mysterious man did not appear, and perhaps the proximity of the sloop was a sufficient excuse for his failure to do so, for it was plain enough that he intended to conceal himself. Andy wondered that he had been so imprudent as to call out to Tom when he raised the revolver; but probably he believed he could not be heard on board of the *Diana*.

Even the wreck of the boat did not prove to be a sufficient inducement to the stranger to betray his presence, and Andy concluded that he had some very strong motive for concealment. This conclusion made the matter all the more serious and important to him, and he was therefore all the more anxious to solve the mystery which surrounded the stranger. But he could do nothing while his movements were hampered by the presence of the fair skipper, and for the present he had to abandon the inquiry.

When the *Diana* was within a short distance of the landing, Andy came about, and braced the sails sharp up, heading her as nearly as the wind would permit for Montoban, for it looked as though he had no further business in the vicinity of the island. The course took the sloop within a short distance of the boat to which the ruffians were clinging.

"I didn't know you were going to run into that boat, Andy," said Di, when the skipper looked at her for the first time in five minutes. This was the third time she had made the same remark.

"You must excuse me for not answering you before," replied Andy, with a smile to show that he had no ill will. "I was on the lookout for that man on the island, and I wanted to hear as well as see, and I was afraid I might lose some sound that would help me to a better understanding of the situation."

"I was sorry I said anything when I saw that you were busy thinking and listening," added Di. "You must excuse me for talking when I ought to have kept still, Andy."

"It is all right then, for I did not mean to offend you."

"You did not offend me—what an idea!" exclaimed she. "I was excited and frightened when the sloop crashed into the boat, and was silly enough to scream. But I got over it in a moment. I did not expect such an ending to the battle."

"I did not tell you what I was going to do, I confess, because I was afraid you would tell me not to do it," Andy explained.

"If you had told me I should not have screamed; but it was so unexpected that I couldn't help it."

"The scream did no harm," laughed Andy.

"It did not occur to me that you could do such a thing."

"Then I ought to explain my conduct, and ask to be forgiven."

"I am glad you punished the wretches as they deserved, and there is nothing to forgive, Andy."

"Perhaps I have got myself into a bad scrape by what I have done, but I can't help it now; and I should do it over again under the same circumstances," added the skipper, looking more serious than he had before.

"Never mind the scrape; my father will pay for the boat if there is any trouble about it."

"It was not so much to punish those villains that I ran into them as it was to save you, first, and myself afterwards, from harm, if not death," said Andy, very seriously.

"From death!" exclaimed Di, with a terrified look.

"Look at the washboard; you see that hole; if your head or mine had been there, it would have been death, wouldn't it?" continued he, pointing at the bullet hole.

"It could hardly have been otherwise," she answered, with a shudder.

"You know I asked you to come out of the cuddy after Tom had stopped firing. He had fired off all the charges contained in two revolvers, and I knew that he could not fire again till he reloaded them. I did not mean to give him time to do this."

"Did he load them again?"

"I don't know; I don't think he did; but I am sure he would have done so if the Diana had not come about, and thus distracted his attention; that is, provided he had any more cartridges."

"Did he have any more?"

"You will have to ask him, Miss Singerlay, for I don't know," replied Andy, with a smile.

"Of course you don't know! What a foolish question!" laughed Di. "If he had any, you did not give him a chance to use them."

"That is just the point; and I did not mean to have him shooting at a boat with a young lady in it."

"You did just right, Andy, and I am sure my father will stand by you to the end," added Di warmly.

"You forget that I am on the other side of the house, Miss Singerlay," said Andy, with a smile, for he felt that he was touching upon delicate matters.

"You forget that you were on the other side of the house when that wretch took my boat away from me, and I shall do my best to make my father forget it also. At any rate, I shall forget it for all time," and Di blushed again.

An hour later, Di was landed in front of her father's house.

CHAPTER VII.—THE RIVAL MAGNATES OF MONTOBAN.

MONTOBAN was at the head of the lake of the same name. It was a flourishing town, almost large enough to be a city; indeed it has risen to this distinction since the events related in this story. Flowing into the lake on the eastern border of the town was the Onongo River, overlooking the mouth of which was the magnificent residence of Mr. Percival Singerlay.

Just above the town the river had been a rushing stream, running through a very wild and picturesque region; and at a distance of something over half a mile from the lake, it was still a rushing stream when there was water enough to swell its current. But there were two dams within half a mile of the lake, which had raised the water and made ponds in the bed of the stream.

Mr. Percival Singerlay and Mr. Phineas Barkpool had formerly been partners in a very profitable manufacturing business, which had made them millionaires in the estimation of other people, though their property was so scattered and of such divers sorts that neither of them could have told whether he was worth a million or only half that princely figure. At any rate they were both rich men, and that is enough.

They had been really the fathers of Montoban and the region about it, for they were public spirited men, and had done their best to develop the resources of the locality. Their enterprise had stimulated others to action, and the place had doubled, tripled and quadrupled its population.

In the day of small things, they had purchased the land on both sides of the river for half a mile, and controlled it wisely in the interests of the

prosperity of the town. But an evil day came ; at least the people thought at the time that it was an evil day, for the two magnates of Montoban quarreled over their business interests. It proved to be a very bitter feud, and each accused the other of cheating and robbing him.

They dissolved partnership, but they could not agree on the division of the common property. Referees divided it for them. They drew a line across the Onongo River, and gave Mr. Singerlay all the land below it, with the manufactory, and all the land above it to Mr. Barkpool. The latter was compensated in cash for the great difference in the value of the moieties.

Mr. Singerlay rubbed his hands, and believed that he had obtained by far the larger half. So thought almost everybody else, and wondered that Mr. Barkpool did not protest against the decision, fully satisfied that he had a remarkably good case.

But Mr. Barkpool did not protest, and even seemed to be pleased with the division, inequitable as it appeared to be to everybody else. The fact came out afterwards that he had contrived to have it known to the referees that he would be willing to take the up-river division of the land ; and this knowledge had greatly lightened the labors of the arbitrators. The business was settled up with all possible haste, and the money award paid to Mr. Barkpool.

Less than a quarter of a mile from the lake was the dam, which furnished the power for the immense factory, of which Mr. Singerlay was now the sole owner. His residence faced the river just below the rapids at the foot of the dam. The manufacturer believed he was the sole magnate of Montoban, and he was accordingly happy in the belief.

Within three days after Mr. Barkpool had deposited his late partner's check for differences in values, a hundred men were at work building a dam a half mile above the old one. As many more were laying the foundation of a mill more extensive than that of Montoban, called the Onongo. By the time the dam was built and the mill was finished, the machinery was ready to go into it.

A whole village of boarding houses and other buildings was erected almost in the twinkling of an eye, and a mansion far surpassing that of the other magnate rose into being in the most beautiful location on the south shore of the lake, to be occupied by the owner of the new mill. In due time all the buildings were completed, and everything was in running order. Families whose members were in want of work took the houses, and the boarding establishments had all they could accommodate. The mill was in operation, and turning out more goods than the old one.

Just at this point there was no rain to speak of for two months, and the river was almost dry. The Onongo mill had to shut down for the want of power ; but so did the Montoban. Mr. Barkpool did not wait a day, but put in steam ; and before his rival knew what he was about, the Onongo was at work again. Mr. Singerlay followed the example of his late partner, but it took time, and his opponent had the market for some weeks.

Mr. Barkpool immediately built a reservoir on his own land, where he stored up the waste water against another dry time, for coal was expensive in the absence of proper facilities of transportation. A branch railroad was

planned; Mr. Singerlay fought to have it run as far as possible from the rival mill, and Mr. Barkpool to get it as near as possible. Each defeated the other, and no road was built.

Mr. Singerlay was president of the Montoban Bank, and, as Mr. Barkpool thought he was not fairly treated in the matter of the discounts, the Onongo Bank was started. The Onongo Hotel was built by the up-river magnate, and the patronage of the Montoban Hotel was reduced for a time. The names of the two mills were applied to halls, saloons, stores, omnibuses, boats and engines.

The town was divided into two factions, and there was constant war between them. Society was divided between the two mills, and even the churches shared in the rivalry. But again Montoban doubled, tripled, and quadrupled its population, for competition is the life of trade. The business done by the mills had been more than doubled, and new enterprises were still the order of the day.

Di Singerlay, as has been said, landed in front of her father's house. Andy Lamb put the Diana in good condition, and after the fair skipper had thanked him again, with a blushing face, for the service he had rendered her, he started for his home, which was in the Onongo domain.

He had to go through the grounds of the Montoban magnate, where he had never been before, and he did not know the way out. The estate was very extensive, and he followed a road after he had parted with the daughter of the house, which he thought would lead him to the street in front of the mansion.

He had gone far enough to see the dome on the town hall, when he heard footsteps, attended with angry talk. The speakers were directly ahead of him, and he recognized their voices, which were those of Mr. Singerlay and his son Dolph, as he was called, though his name in full was Adolphus—too long for common use.

Andy Lamb did not care to meet the father of the fair skipper before she had told him her story; and especially not when he was in an angry mood, as at the present time, for he had the reputation of being a very violent and unreasonable man when he was excited. After looking about him for the best means to effect his retreat, he discovered near him a Norway pine, with branches reaching down to the green sod.

Behind it, and close to the driveway, was a rustic seat. Andy had no time to spare, for the voices were very near, and he dodged behind the pine. The magnate and his son appeared to be having a very rough time of it, and the sixteen year old boy was not particularly respectful to his sire.

"Your boat is good enough, and you don't need another," said Mr. Singerlay. "Don't say another word about it. I won't give you the money; and that is the end of it."

"The Dragon is good enough for a sailboat, but I want a steamer," replied Dolph, in a dogged tone.

Andy thought she was good enough, for she was equal to anything on the Hudson, where he had learned the art of the boatman; and he decided that Dolph was a very unreasonable fellow.

"A steamer!" exclaimed Mr. Singerlay, furiously. "Do you want to get blown up? You don't know any more about handling a steamer than you did when you were a month old, Dolph. Your mother would be frightened out of her wits if you had such a plaything."

"I don't mean to handle the engine myself. I've been through the high school, and I know something about steam."

"Mighty little!" exclaimed the magnate, for Dolph had not been a very promising scholar. "You can't get an engineer, for there is not one in the lower town."

"But I think I can get Morgan Lamb's son; and he knows how to run an engine," replied Dolph.

"Morgan Lamb's son! Do you think I would trust my son in the hands of one of Barkpool's satellites?" demanded the magnate, with intense indignation, to hear his son propose to harbor one of the faction from his rival's district.

"Andy Lamb is a good fellow," added Dolph.

"Thank you," thought Andy. "Di will say as much as that for me."

Just at that moment, the intelligent son of Morgan Lamb, who was competent to run a steam engine, sneezed violently in spite of the effort to suppress the impulse. It was a tremendous, unconditional sneeze, and Mr. Singerlay rushed behind the tree. The moment he saw Andy, he sprang upon him, took him by the collar, and dragged him very roughly into the house.

Oliver Optic.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

AN IDYL.

SHE tripped through the meadows one April day
 The clouds hung low with oppressive gloom,
 But she, enchanting and bright and gay,
 Shed o'er the world such a sunny ray,
 That the wayside flowers sprang into bloom.

And the wind of the Southland swept the earth;
 It carried the scent of the blossoms sweet,
 And another world seemed to spring to birth.
 While the birds gave vent to caroling mirth,
 As a sunbeam glistened at her feet.

Though Cupid had set for her feet a snare, -
 Over the meshes she lightly sped
 And passed unharmed like a bird of the air,
 While I, who came after the maiden fair,
 Was captured by Cupid's net instead.

Walter H. Hanway.

A MONTH IN THE MOON.*

The marvelous experiences that grew out of the Lunar Company, Limited—How the catch-penny scheme of three adventurers was transformed into an extraordinary contribution to the world of science—Scenes and incidents of a sojourn on the earth's satellite.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MESSRS. GRYPHINS, VOGEL AND WAGNER, three adventurers in Melbourne, Australia, start The Lunar Company, for the Conquest and Exploration of the Mineral Riches of the Moon. "But how are we to get to the moon?" is the question asked by large numbers of stockholders, and at a public meeting Wagner talks learnedly of a tubular tunnel, but has his theory utterly demolished by Norbert Mauny, a young Frenchman, who declares that in order to complete such a piece of work within the stipulated time of five years, it must rise at the rate of 50,000 miles a year!

The assemblage is panic stricken and the stockholders demand their money back, when Mauny calls for order and announces that he has a plan to propose—that of attracting the moon to the earth by erecting a series of powerful magnets. The idea is received with enthusiasm, and Mauny is voted manager of the company. The Bayouda Desert in the Soudan is selected as the site for the erection of the magnets. The expedition sets out at Suakim. Mauny meets the French consul, M. Kersain, and his daughter Gertrude, who decide to accompany him on a visit to the Mogaddem of Rhadameh, a local ruler whose favor must be obtained before the transportation of the material across the desert can be made.

This Mogaddem is a weird sort of personage, and possesses a hideously ugly dwarf. After promising to pay certain large sums as tribute, Norbert secures the coöperation he desires and soon after the return to the seaport, the expedition sets out for the Bayouda Desert. Here the observatories, reflectors, etc., are erected on the Peak of Tehbali, and work proceeds with gratifying success till Messrs. Gryphins, Vogel and Wagner are detected in a conspiracy to turn the workmen against Norbert. They are imprisoned and a guard placed over them, and then Norbert, hearing that trouble threatens Khartoum, where M. Kersain has been transferred, determines to go thither and see if he cannot induce him and his daughter to take refuge at the Peak.

The consul refuses to leave his post, but it is finally arranged that Gertrude, accompanied by Dr. Briet, her uncle, and Fatima, her maid, set out with Norbert for Tehbali. On the road they meet a woman fig seller, and shortly after eating some of her fruit a deep sleep falls on all members of the party. On awaking Gertrude discovers that she is in a strange, but beautiful apartment, with only Fatima, who sleeps near her. But presently the hideous dwarf of the Mogaddem of the Rhadameh presents himself and offers his hand in marriage.

CHAPTER XVII.—MYSTERIOUS MAGIC.

ON hearing the dwarf's strange words, Gertrude Kersain was dumb with astonishment. As she made no answer the hideous creature continued with a sneer:

"I, a slave! Is it possible that appearances have thus deceived thee! Know that the universe is my domain, and that my power is boundless as it is mysterious! Thou didst mention my apparent and pretended servitude to the Mogaddem. The Mogaddem is but my instrument and my servant, like

*This story began in the February issue of THE ARGOSY. The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.

the Mahdi, and many others, though they are far from suspecting it. I am the master of the Soudan, pending the time when I shall be master of Africa and of the whole world. I am modest when I speak of offering thee but one throne ; for I can place ten or twenty, or a hundred at thy feet, if thou wilt say but the word, and the whole universe shall do homage to thee like myself a moment ago ! I am Kaddour the all powerful magician. Rejoice, child, for I have chosen thee to share my glory and my power."

"Enough !" exclaimed Gertrude, haughtily. "Vile slave, thinkest thou that thy bragging can inspire aught but disdain?"

The dwarf was not disconcerted.

"Again that word slave?" he cried. "I have already told thee that I am master, here and everywhere. Canst thou not believe it? If my black skin caused thee to class me among a despised race, I can change my color ! See !"

To the amazement of Gertrude and Fatima, the dwarf transformed himself under their eyes. His skin first paled, then became gray, greenish, yellow in turns ; his features contorted convulsively, and he came forth from the struggle hideous as ever—but white !

Fatima gave a terrified scream, and fell prostrate. Gertrude felt her own heart palpitate rapidly, but not for worlds would she have shown alarm.

"Think not to frighten me by this juggling," she said. "White or black, to me thou art naught but a charlatan. If it is thou who hast brought me hither, release me as quickly as possible. Thou wilt gain nothing by delay, and thy ridiculous venture will be forgiven only on condition of my immediate freedom. Bethink thee that I belong to a powerful nation that knows how to protect the honor of its children !"

"Speak not to me of thy nation !" thundered the dwarf. "I have said, and I repeat, that my power is limitless ; the acts of nations, and the very counsels of kings, did they but know it, depend on me. I am he who holds the invisible threads of destiny throughout the world. Men are but puppets in my hands. Thou dost not believe me? Thou needest proofs? Thou shalt have them !"

He beat his enormous hands, and suddenly one of the alcoves opened, and formed into a stage scene with the difference that instead of side wings of wood and canvas there appeared a long gallery lighted by silver torches and filled with marble statues, colonnades, and rich decorations. On a raised platform in the middle of the gallery stood a golden throne, and a numerous court surrounded it, bowing respectfully as if it were occupied instead of standing empty.

Every type of humanity and variety of costume were represented. There were narrow eyed Chinese, Japanese in their lacquer armor, Indians, Arabs wrapped in white burnouses, Canadians in furred coats, Zulus with their assegais, Boers with rifles, tattooed Fijians, and a hundred others.

When the crowd had defiled before the throne, and had taken their places down the sides of the gallery, the aforesaid gigantic negro, who had announced the entry of Kaddour, now stepped to the foreground as if awaiting the orders of his master.

"Call the envoy of Canada," said the latter.

An American half breed, clothed from head to foot in beaver skins, stepped forward, bowed profoundly before Kaddour, and said in French :

"Master Riel waits but thy orders to instigate his Manitoban brethren against England."

"The envoy of the Boers !" cried Kaddour.

A rude, sunburnt peasant slouched heavily forward, pulled a sealed letter out of his cap, and handed it to the negro, saying in Dutch :

"The Boers of the Cape send greeting to Kaddour, and will revolt when he gives the signal."

The dwarf translated all this to Gertrude ; then he resumed :

"Let India advance !"

A young maiden in the costume of a Nautch girl came forward, wrapped in a silver spangled gauze veil, and spoke as follows, in a clear musical voice :

"India seems to slumber, but she is waiting. Two hundred millions are at the service of the all powerful Kaddour to strike for freedom and vengeance."

"Is my daughter of green Erin present?" asked the dwarf.

A fair skinned Irish woman, dressed in deep mourning, responded :

"The Invincibles are ready to blow up London should the master think that will advance the cause !"

"Now the son of the Mahdi !" shouted the dwarf.

"Kaddour is great and the Mahdi is his prophet," said the young Arab instantly.

"Enough !" replied Kaddour. "Disappear."

The alcove closed suddenly, and the vision vanished.

"Thou seest who I am?" he said, turning to Gertrude.

Crossing his long arms on his misshapen chest, he gave her a look of irony, which she returned with interest.

"I see," she answered, "that thou hast clever actors who know their parts well !"

"Actors ! Is it thus thou termet all these agents of my power, whom thou hast just seen ? They are not actors, child. Unknown to each other, divided in race, in interests, in animosities, I alone govern them. I alone can inflame their anger. Were I to say but a word, the world might be in ruins tomorrow, and I alone reigning in the light of day, as now I reign supreme in the darkness ! Matny thought to conceal his plans from me. I knew them in detail the moment they were arranged. Thou thyself were starting for Tehbali, and see ! Thou art here !"

"Yes ! Thanks to some shameful treachery !" cried Gertrude. "It matters not, dwarf ; I do not believe in thy boasted power."

"Thou dost not believe it even now ? What then would convince thee ? Wouldst thou see what brave Gordon is this moment writing to his government ?"

Once more the dwarf beat his hands. Another alcove similar to the first opened, disclosing, not a sumptuous gallery, but a plain telegraph office. The wires lay on a table, and were all numbered and attached to the machine.

On a level with the latter were ivory plates, bearing the inscriptions: *Paris, London, Rome, Constantinople, St. Petersburg, New York, Peking, Calcutta, Quebec, etc.*

"I have turned the Khartoum wire aside," said the dwarf, laughing, "and Gordon's despatches must pass here on their way to Cairo. Read this if thou art interested."

Gertrude remained motionless.

"I will read it to thee," continued Kaddour.

General Gordon to Sir Evelyn Baring, Agent-General of Her Britannic Majesty at Cairo.

KHARTOUM, March 2.

If an English battalion start for Khartoum *via* the Nile, everything will be saved. The number of men is unimportant; the prestige is sufficient. The insurrection will die out of itself if only I am supposed to be supported by European troops. If not, all is lost. We shall be blockaded in less than three days.

(Signed)

GORDON.

"I shall send on the despatch," said the dwarf, with a sneer, "but I shall alter it somewhat by stating that *no* army of support is needed. What sayest thou, child? Now dost thou believe in my power?"

"I believe in thy treachery!"

CHAPTER XVIII.—THE DWARF'S POWER.

THE dwarf grew pale with rage. For a few minutes he remained in a gloomy reverie. Then, turning to Gertrude, he said with a long drawn sigh:

"How can I manage to convince thee? Foolish girl! Art thou then impervious to fear? Thou art not content with what thou hast seen already. Perhaps thou desirest proofs of my supernatural power? Thou shalt have them. Wouldst thou at this moment behold him of whom thou art thinking?"

He blew a shrill blast on the silver whistle hanging to his sash. Instantly a third alcove opened like the others, and behind a screen formed of a large sheet of crystal there arose a slight cloud like mist. This gradually condensed and took at length a human shape. Gertrude recognized her father.

He was seated in his office in the French Consulate at Khartoum, and attentively studying a report that lay before him. On a sudden he leaned back in his arm chair. Then he opened a drawer in his desk, and took out a portrait that Gertrude tearfully recognized as her own.

The consul kissed it long and tenderly. Tears must have filled his eyes, for Gertrude saw him wipe them away, and her own flowed so freely at the sight that she could no longer distinguish anything. Little by little the vision faded away.

"That is the present," said the dwarf, "and now behold the future."

On the crystal screen where but a moment before the image of her beloved father had rested, Gertrude now beheld a circular form that gradually took distinct shape. She knew it for the grand square at Khartoum, with the Government House on one side, the French Consulate on the other.

It was apparently the dawn of day; people of every age and condition were

running across the empty square. They wore a haggard, terror stricken aspect. All at once an officer issued from the Government House followed by four or five men. He was short in stature, fair haired and blue eyed, and he descended the steps with great rapidity. Anger gleamed from his countenance. As he turned round, Gertrude saw that it was General Gordon.

At the same instant a band of ragged Arabs burst into the square. As soon as they perceived the little group coming towards them they stood still and fired a volley from their rifles. The general fell. His escort fled, whilst the insurgents ran to him; and with a shudder of horror Gertrude saw them hold up the bleeding head of Gordon.

Averting her eyes from this terrible sight, she glanced at the Consulate and thought she saw her father coming forth alone. An agony of apprehension came over her afresh, and to her loving, filial heart, a yet more horrible catastrophe was about to be shown her; and meanwhile, as she gazed, the vision clouded over and disappeared.

For a few minutes Gertrude was too shocked to speak; but soon regaining command over herself, she said coldly:

"The future does not belong to thee. What thou hast shown me is only an evil dream. Gordon will not fall by thy means, but he will hang every one of you."

"Thou dardest to speak thus to me?" cried the dwarf, grinding his teeth. "Ah! thou fearest nothing? Well, then behold!"

Whilst saying these words he held up both arms.

At once a hideous din arose, seeming as if it would rend the very bowels of the earth. The carved monsters who upheld the doors and cornices suddenly came to life, and filled the chamber with their howling. The paintings on the walls appeared to stand out apart with strange gestures; gods with heads of dogs, cats, jackals and birds, strange beasts and monstrous crocodiles advanced towards the girl, turning their bloodshot eyes on her.

Nearly mad with terror, Fatima rushed shrieking into the arms of her mistress.

"Stop the menagerie," said Gertrude disdainfully to the dwarf. "If thou art trying to frighten me, I warn thee that it is a waste of time."

Kaddour muttered a few words in an unknown tongue. At once the monsters resumed their places. Gertrude shrugged her shoulders. But the dwarf fixed his flaming eyes on Fatima, and made a sign. The young servant, leaving her mistress went toward him. Her eyes were wide open, but their look was, as it were, turned inward.

"Fatima," said the magician in a sepulchral tone, "thou lovest thy mistress, I know. She believes in thy affection, and cherishes thee as a sister. But I say to thee, take this poinard out of my sash and plunge it in her heart!"

Fatima gave a deep sigh; two big tears hung on her eyelashes and rolled down her cheeks. Nevertheless she stood before the dwarf, took the poinard from his sash, and turned toward Gertrude with uplifted arm, ready to strike.

"Hold!" said the dwarf.

She stood still as if turned to stone, her arm fixed in its attitude.

As to Gertrude, she could scarce restrain her tears.

"Poor child," she murmured, trying gently to lower the rigid arm of her little maid, "do not be afraid lest I might blame thee. I know this is nothing but hypnotism, and such witchcraft cannot shake my faith in thy fidelity."

"At least it proves my power to thee?" said Kaddour, making a sign which restored Fatima to consciousness. She came out of her cataleptic sleep all trembling, and at once ran to her mistress like a frightened fawn.

"Hearken to me," continued the dwarf. "Thou art a woman. It is impossible that thou shouldst not be attracted by the prospect of power, unique, absolute and illimitable. Thou knowest that riches are absolutely at my disposal, for there are no treasures inaccessible to a power like mine. Thou canst not doubt that any secret is unknown to me. Neither the visible nor the invisible has any mystery for me. I know everything; I can do everything. At my service are the resources of ancient and modern science, the traditions of all the magicians, black and white, European and Asiatic. And I ask thee, wilt thou share this unexampled power with me? Wilt thou be crowned Queen of Africa, Empress of India, of China, of the world? If this does not please thee, it needs but a sign from thee, and I remain in the shade, all powerful, but hidden, as I have been until this day; and thou shalt reign with me without the source of thy power being suspected."

Perhaps the situation had its tragic side, but Gertrude was so irresistibly struck with its comicality that she burst out laughing.

"Unhappy being," he howled; "thou shalt not laugh long, I swear. The earth shall suffer for what thou hast done! Wert thou to live a hundred years thou wouldst not have time enough to repent insulting Kaddour!"

He went away in a rage. The door had scarcely closed behind him when Gertrude and Fatima heard heavy bolts and chains clanking against their prison walls.

An hour went by in peace. At the end of that time the door opened once more, and an exclamation of joy broke from both as they saw Norbert Mauvy standing on the threshold.

"Gertrude! Mlle. Kersain!" cried the young astronomer. "I never expected the happiness of finding you in this mysterious prison! Will you ever forgive me for having brought you here?"

"Forgive you!" said Gertrude, "what are you talking about? Are you not also a prisoner? I am only too thankful to see you again! Do you know what has become of Dr. Briet and Mabrouki?"

"I have not set eyes on them since we ate those unlucky figs, that doubtless contained some subtle narcotic."

"It is for you, rather," Gertrude continued, "to reproach *me* for *your* captivity, for had it not been for me you would never have been here!"

"If only I could prove my devotion to you more clearly!" cried Norbert. "We must certainly get out of this. But how in the world are we to ascertain where we are, and in whose custody!"

"Do you not know? The dwarf of Rhadameh is our jailer; and not an hour ago he offered me his hand!"

"Insolent myrmidon!"

"I laughed in his face as you may imagine, and he went off in a towering rage, threatening me with vengeance."

"The point is," said Norbert, looking round, "what he *can* do, and what he *intends* to do. This dungeon of yours is rather different from mine."

He had not ceased speaking when a panel slid aside in the wall, and the dwarf of Rhadameh stood before them at the head of two or three hundred black men. Norbert noted as passing strange that this troop was exactly similar in every particular to his own negro guard. The men were of the same type, equipped alike, with tiger skin shields, and the same kind of helmets and lances.

"I will show you what I *will* do, and what I *can* do," said Kaddour, echoing the last words of the young astronomer. "I *will* that this young girl become my wife, and I *can* do a great deal to oblige her to consent. For instance, I can subject thee to torture. I can take thee to Tehbali, I can, under your very eyes, destroy, stone by stone, all the works of your ambitious vanity. We shall see then if thou wilt not be the first to ask her to accept my offer!"

"Gertrude!" cried Norbert, "do not yield out of pity for me, I pray you! It would, indeed, be maddening to witness the destruction by this wretch of the works that have cost me so much time and trouble. But that you should marry *him* would be the very bitterest grief to me of all."

"Nothing is farther from my thoughts," said Gertrude calmly; "and if anything should increase my horror for the monster it would be the means he has chosen whereby to shake my resolution!"

Kaddour grew white with fury.

"Bring cords!" he cried, "and bind this fine gentleman! We will begin by going to Tehbali. It is time that I tried my hand there, too; all the more so, that I have a bone to pick with others there besides Norbert Mauny."

CHAPTER XIX.—THE SONS OF THE LAKE.

SIR BUCEPHALUS had not long been awake, and was taking his usual morning constitutional round the plateau of Tehbali, when Virgil came to him saying:

"I have just had pointed out to me, sir, a troop of armed men in the distance, who seem to be coming this way. I had stringent orders that no one was to be allowed to visit the works without a pass. I think it will be well to arm the negro guard, and go and meet this suspicious looking troop."

"Very well," replied the baronet, with supreme indifference.

The baronet resumed his constitutional for an hour precisely, watch in hand, and then seating himself in a caned chair, he buried his head in the European newspapers—they were brought him every morning by a special messenger from Berber.

"Gordon named Governor General of the Soudan!" he exclaimed a minute after. "Reached Khartoum, having crossed the desert alone on a

camel! Just like him!" murmured Sir Bucephalus, as he hurriedly glanced over the *Times*. "That, no doubt, is the explanation of Mauny's delay at Khartoum."

Meanwhile Virgil had armed the negro guard, and marshaling them in double file, had taken the lead down the road. In twenty minutes his hundred warriors, agile as panthers, were in the plain beyond the village, and stood in battle array against the newcomers at the range of about two gunshots from the first huts. The enemy soon appeared. Their caravan consisted of one camel, bearing a kind of closed palanquin, with Gertrude and Fatima within; three others followed, on which Norbert, Doctor Briet and Mabrouki, all gagged and chained, had journeyed five days; the rear was brought up by the dwarf of Rhadamèh, mounted on a magnificent Arab steed, and followed by his negro guard.

At the first glimpse Virgil saw it was his master, and he knew that some misfortune had happened. But his intrepid heart knew no hesitation.

"Halt!" he cried, stepping out alone twenty paces in advance of the troops. What are your intentions? Why do you keep these gentlemen prisoners, and subject them to this shameful treatment?"

Kaddour had ridden up to the head of his troop. Surprised at first by the unexpected resistance, he quickly recovered his audacity on finding that his own guard was three times stronger than the opposing one.

"My intention is," he replied arrogantly, "to take possession of the Peak of Tehbali. Surrender instantly, or be annihilated!"

"Surrender our arms!" exclaimed Virgil. "Wretched dwarf, you shall swallow them first!"

He turned round, and drawing his sword, gave the word of command to his troop. "Make ready! Present! Fire!"

To the extreme surprise of both, the command was not obeyed on either side. One of the dwarf's officers left the ranks, and came up to speak to him; whilst Chaka likewise left his comrades and, approaching Virgil, said, pointing to the negro guard of the dwarf:

"The sons of the Great Lake war not against each other. Command us what thou wilt, except to fire upon our brethren."

At the same time the dwarf's officer was saying:

"These men are, like ourselves, the children of the Great Lake countries. Brothers do not fight."

Kaddour foamed at the mouth and bit his nails in impotent rage. But he saw that his anger was all in vain, and muttered in a choked voice:

"Well, then, file to the left, and let us return whence we came!"

But Virgil was not going to suffer this. He had been a silent spectator of the scene, and he intended to free his master.

"Wait," he cried, rushing at him. "There is no reason why *we* should not fight, though our troops refuse to do so. Come on, and let the conqueror take the prisoners!"

This bold challenge was loudly applauded by the negro guard on both sides. They knew well how to appreciate deeds of valor.

Without pausing for a reply, Virgil threw himself upon Kaddour with

uplifted sword. The dwarf had only time to parry the first blow by making his horse curvet, and to thrust with his fine Damascens steel blade. Virgil stood on guard, when suddenly his sword broke short off as the blades met.

Every one thought he was done for. But not so. Scarcely was he disarmed when he bounded like a tiger at the dwarf's throat, and, seizing him in his strong hands, lifted him bodily out of the saddle and hurled him to the ground, where he held him pinned down by the knee before the wretch could move a finger in his own defense.

The brave deed was loudly cheered by both sides. Had Virgil been armed, there is no doubt that the dwarf would then and there have expiated his misdeeds. As it was, he was almost strangled by the grip of the Algerian.

But when the first moment of anger was over, Virgil thought he had better not push his victory any further, seeing that his enemy was down and apparently stunned. He made a sign, therefore, to his men to carry away the inanimate body of the dwarf.

The negro guard of Kaddour came up at once to fraternize with the men of Tehbali. They screamed and danced, and embraced each other alternately. It was evident that there could be no question in future of any enmity between them.

Perhaps the dwarf's guard were the most satisfied with a result that delivered them forever from his tyrannous rule. They let themselves therefore be led away without protest, and did not even make a pretence of opposing Virgil, who had hastened at once to the prisoners.

It was the work of two minutes to deliver Norbert Mauny, the doctor and Mabrouki from their bonds, and to take Gertrude and Fatima out of the palanquin. They had witnessed the foregoing scene from behind the closed blinds of their prison.

Norbert's first thought on regaining his freedom was to put Gertrude out of the reach of further danger. He at once sent her on in front with the doctor and Fatima. He then commissioned Virgil to enroll the dwarf's guards among his own troops.

But after consultation among themselves the officers declined the offer, saying that the dwarf of Rhadameh having been beaten in fair combat, they would make no opposition against his having personally to bear the consequences of his defeat; but it would be incompatible with their honor as free lances to enter the service of the conqueror, just as, in like manner, they could not in honor make war against their brethren.

They added that they were sure of employment elsewhere. The Mahdi was marching on Khartoum; they would go at once, and take service under his banner.

Norbert could not but honor these chivalrous motives (so often noted by travelers) in the poor children of the Lake countries, exiled and homeless as they were. He asked them to accept some refreshment as a favor to himself, and, cordially shaking hands with their officers, he bade them farewell, and hastened to climb the Peak of Tehbali once again.

He was followed by the negro guard under Virgil. The unconscious

Kaddour was carried on a shield by four men, and in the distance resembled nothing so much as a piece of roast beef on a large dish, as Sir Bucephalus remarked on seeing the approaching procession.

Norbert's first care was to have the dwarf conveyed to the chamber vacated by the three "commissioners of control." This room opened off from the right hand side of the circular passage. The doctor was requested by Norbert to attend to the dwarf's injuries, and a sentinel was posted at the door of the room. Norbert then hastened to the drawing room, where Gertrude, hardly as yet recovered from her agitation, smilingly awaited him.

Now that the danger was past, they could measure its extent. What would have become of them had it not been for the sudden disaffection of the two troops, and the heroic presence of mind of Virgil?

There was no doubt but that the dwarf of Rhadameh would have destroyed the works, pillaged the observatory, murdered every man in Tehbali, perhaps with horrible torments. Now they were free and victorious and he was in their power.

Had Norbert given rein only to his indignation at the presumption of the miserable charlatan in daring to raise his eyes to Gertrude, and to subject himself (Norbert) to such ignominious treatment, he would have made short work of the wretch; but with a delicacy of sentiment that all noble natures will appreciate, he mistrusted his first impulse so far as to postpone carrying it out whilst the dwarf lay unconscious; and hence his first act was to request the doctor to attend to the prisoner.

Briet reported the dwarf as still insensible, and suffering apparently from congestion of the brain. All idea of capital punishment was set aside for the time, therefore, since no one kills a stunned and defenseless enemy.

The question also rose as to whether it was not, after all, a fortunate occurrence that he should be still alive, for he might turn out to be a useful hostage with reference to the Mogaddem of Rhadameh and the Cherofa tribe. This was the unanimous opinion after they had discussed the facts that had come to light, and had thanked Virgil profusely for the brave heroism that had changed the tragic situation into one of rejoicing and triumph.

Gertrude recounted the episode of Gordon's telegram and the witchcraft by which Kaddour had tried to dazzle her. There could be no doubt that he was perhaps the most important personage in the Soudan, owing to the extent of his knowledge and his occult power. It might well be that fate had put into Norbert's hand the sole weapon whereby to subdue, not merely the tribes of the Soudan, but the population of all Mussulman lands.

The dwarf had boasted that in his hands the Mahdi was but a puppet who would dance to his piping. The Mahdi was certainly marching upon Khartoum, and if the despatches of Gordon were stopped and changed as seen by Gertrude, this rendered the approaching advent of an English army of relief less and less probable. In fine, it was all important to guard their hostage, even if only from the narrow personal point of view that their workmen at Tehbali needed recruiting.

It was necessary, then, to cure him, and keep him in sight, for the common safety depended perhaps on his life.

Virgil received orders to double the guard outside the prison room, and to be on watch against the certain attempt of the prisoner, once afoot again, to make good his escape.

"Do not fear but that I shall keep my eye on him," he answered, when Norbert gave him his instructions; "I am not going to be done by a miserable insect like that!"

CHAPTER XX.—THE DWARF AT BAY.

SEATED at the telescope on the Peak of Tehbali, Gertrude each morning surveyed the plain in the direction of Khartoum, hoping to see a group of travelers coming toward the peak. But though her great impatience to see her father was very natural, she was too well bred to obtrude it upon her host, and kept to herself the bitter disappointment of each day as it came bringing no news. It was with a heavy heart often that she took her seat at the breakfast table.

Her traveling companions, for their part, did their best to distract her thoughts, and were careful not to touch upon the subject uppermost in the minds of all. The doctor, especially, tried to amuse them with a daily account of his clinical observations.

"The dwarf," said he one morning, as he seated himself beside his niece at breakfast, "is one of the most singular beings I have ever seen. He has been conscious now for forty eight hours, and I have not been able to extract a word from him! Can it be that his speaking faculties are injured by some lesion of the brain? Or is he shamming dumbness, as he did on the two first occasions of our meeting him? It is impossible to say. And I have not been able to discover whether he is black or white (as he might very well be after what Gertrude witnessed during her imprisonment). I should not be at all surprised if he were dyed from head to foot, for his skin is of a slate color, quite unlike those of other Nubians. But many things that we in Europe cannot do are but child's play to the Eastern magicians, and I should not be at all surprised if this were of the number!"

As soon as he was on his feet again, the dwarf was permitted to take the air twice a day in the circular passage, under the eye of the sentinel at his door, and of the body guard, who were about twenty yards distant. All communications between him and the soldiers were forbidden; but the prohibition seemed unnecessary, for Kaddour never said a word, nor made the least sign; he merely dragged himself about, wrapped in a huge white burnouse.

More frequently he would spend the whole hour allotted for exercise upright in a corner, some distance from the soldiers and perfectly motionless, his forehead supported by his right hand, as if absorbed in meditation.

At other times, seating himself on a stone, he would take off his left sandal and grasp his foot in both hands, considering it attentively, after the fashion of the fakirs. But never, not even by a glance, did he evince the least wish to converse with his keepers.

Virgil, who kept a sharp eye upon him at these times, ended by being

completely at rest on this point. There was one thing, however, that he (Virgil) could not help, partly because he did not see its danger, and partly because he was himself slightly under its influence; this was the effect upon the minds of those who were the daily witnesses of the silent and meditative attitude and behavior of Kaddour. They all began to consider him a personage of note on account of the austerity of his demeanor.

One morning he cut a hazel stick from the hedge, and made of it a wand about ten inches in length, employing all his leisure moments afterwards in carving figures upon it with a splinter of glass that he had picked up under a window. There was nothing to be said about this, for, from time immemorial, carving wood has been the favorite diversion of prisoners.

One day, when Virgil having satisfied himself that everything was going on well in the circular passage, had departed to visit the works in progress, Chaka and some of his men were sitting in the sun outside their barracks, chatting about their own country.

"Alas!" said one, "when shall we see Bahr-el Ghazal again, where the crocodiles were as gentle as doves, and the herbs like small trees?"

"Where the corn bears fruit eight days after it is sown!" added another.

"The Supreme Master," said a voice behind the soldiers, "can make the corn grow and ripen in less than an hour!"

"Who speaks thus in the language of our fathers!" cried Chaka, turning round in surprise.

He caught sight of Kaddour, standing motionless and upright at the rope barrier of his yard.

"Thou hast uttered a great word, my brother," resumed the young chief; "but who is this powerful Supreme Master?"

"He who was, who is, and who will be!" replied the dwarf, solemnly.

"And you have seen him do what you say?"

"Not only have I seen him do it, but he has conferred the same supernatural power on myself."

"Thou knowest how to make the corn grow in less than an hour?"

"In a few minutes, if you like."

All the soldiers leaped to their feet in a fever of ardent curiosity.

"Father," said Chaka, "here are seeds of corn; make them take root."

"In order to do that I must be surrounded by twenty of those *who have been ill treated*."

"Who are they?"

"Seek them, son, seek them. They have not white faces."

"Ah!" cried Chaka, "black men! Call our brethren!" he added, to his companions, pointing to the free lances inside the barracks.

In a few minutes twenty men stood around the cord barrier. The dwarf then walking backwards to the middle of his yard, and making signs that strict silence was to be maintained, took out the wooden wand he had so patiently carved, and waved it over his head while he uttered some cabalistic words.

Then he drew a great circle on the ground, and squatting down in the

middle of it, dug five or six holes with his hand. In these holes he placed the seeds given him by Chaka, and covered them over with a pinch of earth, moistened with saliva.

Kaddour again brandished his wand over the circular trench that contained the seeds, and murmured some incomprehensible words. At the end of a few moments the earth was seen to rise up slightly over the holes, and some little green shoots appeared. These, growing gradually, turned out to be reeds, that in ten minutes reached the height of ten inches.

At this sight, the black warriors, no longer able to contain their admiration, uttered loud cries. Kaddour silenced them with his uplifted hand, and went on with his incantations. The corn continued to grow, and soon it overtopped the dwarf, who was now standing up. A little bud appeared on every branch, and in another minute or two it would have swelled up, burst into blossoms, and subsequently have ripened into ears.

"Chaka," said the dwarf on a sudden, from the middle of his green circle, "wouldst thou behold him whom thou didst most hate?"

"He of whom thou speakest is dead!" replied the young chief, with a triumphant laugh.

"I know it. Thou art thinking of the son of Zebehr, whose head the bashibazouks cut off three years ago."

"Father," cried Chaka, "thou readest the very thoughts of men!"

"As, likewise, I can call up the dead. This very evening, if thou wilt, I will show thee Suliman, the son of Zebehr, he who ordered thee to be *flogged for his diversion. He shall tell thee what he is suffering, and he shall crave thy pardon for his crimes.*"

"I will, father! We all will!" replied Chaka, trembling at the idea of seeing the persecutor of his childhood once more face to face.

"Well, then, all of you pass before my window this evening at the hour when the moon hides herself behind the hills of Darfour. You shall then see Suliman!"

Kaddour had scarcely ceased to speak when the outer door opened, and Virgil appeared on the threshold.

Hardly had the negro guard time to glance at the newcomer before the corn had already disappeared, being torn up by the roots, and smuggled under the folds of the dwarf's robe. He stood silent and motionless, as if absorbed in his wonted meditation.

But Virgil saw quite enough to convince him that something unusual was going on. The troubled, startled expression on the faces of the black men, as they stood close pressed against the cord barrier, spoke for itself. He was careful, however, not to disclose his suspicions, and shortly withdrew, having seen Kaddour once more safely caged. But Virgil wisely determined, all the same, to redouble his precautions.

CHAPTER XXI.—SUMMARY MEASURES.

WHEN the time came for his usual evening round, Virgil saw that the guard were in a state of evident agitation or impatience, and seemed to be

waiting for something to happen. He ordered the lights to be extinguished at an early hour, and made a pretense of retiring ; but, returning almost directly by the other entrance to the circular passage, he posted himself where he could watch without being observed.

Virgil soon found that the guard also were watching in the dark, which decided him to wait until the reason for this extraordinary behavior should become clear.

The moon had just sunk below the horizon when Chaka and his men left the barracks, one by one, and proceeded on tiptoe towards the prison. They were evidently trying to make as little noise as possible, but that they were very excited was plain from the stifled exclamations that escaped them in the course of the very voluble conversation that was carried on in whispers.

It was a dark night, and Virgil could not well see what was happening ; but on a sudden a bright light from one of the windows of Kaddour's lodging shone out on the guard grouped in front. The warriors, brave as they were before the enemy, seemed all stricken with terror, and clung close to each other, not daring to move backwards or forwards.

In the opening of the window stood a white wooden table, unevenly made, and devoid of cover or any ornament whatsoever. A brass dish was on the table, and it contained a bleeding human head, which all the warriors recognized for that of Suliman, the son of Zebehr !—of Suliman, who had been dead for three years ! The head lifted itself off the dish, opened its eyes, and looked about !

All at once the lips of the dead man moved. Were they about to speak ? They did speak, and with the identical guttural drawl that had characterized the son of Zebehr.

"I made you suffer," said the voice ; "now I suffer ! Listen to me, sons of the Lake ! Listen to me, if you would escape the torments that I endure in the cavern of death ! You must embrace the cause of the Prophet ! You must obey the orders he gives you through his faithful servant Kaddour ! You must cease to serve the unbelievers, and you must unite with your black brethren against the Europeans ! Unless you massacre the white men you will see them triumphant throughout the desert, and they will drink your blood ! Take heed to my words, sons of the Lake, for I have spoken thus to you to buy my own pardon !"

The light then went out and the vision disappeared. But the guard were still further terrified by a long sigh—a heart rending sob—that seemed to come from the very bowels of the earth. Surprise and horror kept them for some time motionless, and when at length they dared to move, all withdrew in silence to their barracks.

Virgil thought rightly that there was not a moment to lose. Lighting his lantern, that he had before purposely extinguished lest they should see him, he ran to the door of the prison, unlocked it, and surprised Kaddour in the act of taking off his masquerading costume and its accompanying shams.

Plaster, scratched off the wall, had given a deathlike look to his features ; he had opened a small vein in his arm to tinge the linen with blood ; the dressing table out of Peter Gryphins' room had furnished the round hole cou-

taining the brass dish that held the head ; and the mirror to reflect the light had been borrowed from the lodging of Ignaz Vogel.

It took but a few minutes for Virgil to rush upon the dwarf, throw him down, gag him, and tie him head and heels. He then hurried out, and hastened to report to Norbert all that had happened.

"You will, of course, do as you please, sir," said Virgil, as he concluded his recital ; "but, believe me, a summary execution is the only way to prevent a revolt among the guard."

Although severe measures were foreign to his own ideas and habits, Norbert was much inclined to agree with Virgil. The case was very pressing, as well as serious ; it was necessary to take immediate steps, and to strike a decisive blow.

Weighing the matter well for a few minutes, Norbert came to the conclusion that it would be impossible to spare the life of the dwarf unless, in the presence of his dupes, he made full and detailed confession of his trickeries. He therefore seated himself at his desk, and drew up a provisional sentence of death, whilst Virgil went to arouse the doctor and the baronet.

"I am under the dreadful necessity, gentlemen," said Norbert, "of decreeing on my own responsibility the immediate death of a man. I need not tell you how painful it is to me to have to do this. But I could not hesitate without serious peril to the precious lives under my charge. When I leave this land I shall make it my duty to submit my conduct in the matter, and to lay the circumstances before a duly qualified tribunal. I have sent for you to ask you to be so good as to sign the official report that shall be drawn up."

On hearing the details, the doctor and Sir Bucephalus fully approved of their friend's decision, and declared their readiness to join him in signing not merely the official report, but likewise the sentence itself, but this generous offer Norbert as generously declined to accept.

Orders were given to marshal the guard, without arms, in the circular passage, to which all repaired, the guard being ranged in four lines, Chaka at their head.

"My friends," said Norbert, "you have been deceived by an imposter. The miserable tricks by which he endeavored to shake your sense of honor and fidelity were, in truth, an insult to brave warriors like yourselves. I know well that you would only despise such juggling ; but before inflicting the punishment he deserves for his base intention, I wish you to see by what means he tried to make fools of you. Chaka, take six men with you, and come with us to the prison !"

The young chief obeyed without a word, but it was evident that neither he nor his warriors expected anything to come of this visit.

"Here is the table, the mirror, and the blood stained linen used by the imposter," said Norbert, proceeding to explain to the negroes the different uses of these accessories in the imposition of the "speaking head."

"But where is the head of Suliman?" said Chaka ironically, pretending not to understand Norbert.

At the same instant he caught sight of the corn stalks brought by Kaddour.

"And this corn? How did he make it grow in less than an hour?" he asked. "For we saw it grow under our eyes."

This was news to Norbert, who had, of course, no explanation to give. The men looked at one another, and shook their heads.

"Bring out the condemned man!" said the astronomer, as he reëntered the circular passage with his followers.

Virgil soon returned with the dwarf, whose countenance betokened no anxiety whatever.

"Stand there," said Norbert, pointing to the wall. "I will read you your sentence."

The document that he proceeded to read aloud by the light of a torch was lengthy, and set forth all the facts of the case, concluding with the following words:

Wherefore, because of the aforesaid crimes of abduction, arbitrary detention, exciting to massacre, and attempt to entice away, the dwarf Kaddour, is condemned to the penalty of death. He will be shot ten minutes after he shall have had notice of this sentence.

NORBERT MAUNY.

Mabrouki translated these words to the guard, who received them in profound silence. It was evident that they were looking for the manifestation of the power of Kaddour by some fresh prodigy.

Norbert turned to him.

"You have heard," he said. "One chance is still left to you. Confess and explain immediately the witchcraft whereby you tried to delude these brave warriors. If you do this thoroughly and candidly, your life shall be spared."

"I want no favor," replied Kaddour calmly, and not without some dignity.

"You have still seven minutes to decide," continued Norbert, taking out his chronometer. "If you will only own to your fraud the sentence shall be commuted into imprisonment! Mabrouki, Virgil," he added, "prepare your weapons."

"I ask no favor," repeated the dwarf, in a firm voice. "I will not even wait for the expiration of your seven minutes! I will hasten to taste eternal felicity, and will not tarry for your signal!"

Saying this, he hurriedly drew from his finger a ring whose crystal bezil opened by means of a spring, and put it to his lips.

"It is," he murmured "the ring of Eblis, the Angel of Death, who will conduct me to the abode of the blessed!"

He fell back, as if struck by lightning. The doctor examined the motionless corpse. The skin was already cold, the pulse had stopped, the eyes were glassed over, the heart had ceased to beat.

"Death must have been instantaneous," said Briet. "It must have been caused by some such rapid poison as prussic acid. But what is it, I wonder?"

He took the ring from the dead man's hand. All that was left in the bezil was a faint indication of a bluish liquid, that evaporated in a few minutes, so that any analysis was out of the question.

"He has spared us the trouble of shooting him; it was the best thing he

could have done! And we must at least own that he died bravely," added Norbert, by way of a funeral oration.

He ordered the body to be taken back to the prison, and to be buried on the following morning.

The guard petitioned to have this charge intrusted to them. It was granted, and a few minutes before sunrise they accompanied the dead man to his burying place on the eastern slope of Tehbali. According to the custom of the Arabs, he was interred in a rockhewn cave, and the entrance was closed with a large stoue.

CHAPTER XXII.—AN EXCITING CRISIS.

THE first event of importance during the following days was an attempt by Aben-Zegri and the other Cherofas to blow up the glass furnaces. It was soon frustrated by the assistance of the guard. Norbert adhered to his usual policy of moderation, and contented himself with expelling the delinquents from his workshops, warning them that if they were found there again they would be subjected to all the rigors of martial law.

Aben-Zegri and his accomplices were deprived of their weapons and conducted to the boundary of the plateau of Tehbali, where they were left at liberty, with sufficient provisions to last them for eight days. They went out into the desert, and were no more heard of.

Eight days went by peacefully, yet the news brought by the convoys from Berber grew worse and worse. It was known now with certainty that Osman Digna held the Suakim route, and that other Arab corps had been seen even in the neighborhood of Dongola, thus barring the Nile route also.

All communication with Khartoum was interrupted; the telegraph wire appeared to have been cut, for no more despatches came; the Mahdist invasion was everywhere. The invading army, a hundred thousand strong, occupied Omdurman, and was already beating like the waves of a stormy sea against the ramparts of Khartoum.

Tomorrow, perhaps, would come the turn of Berber and Tehbali. In any case, all idea of retreat, either by way of Egypt or by the Red Sea, was at an end, since every communication was closed, and the Arab tribes had all risen. Darfour even had joined the irresistible insurrection of Eastern Africa against the hated European yoke.

The hour so often foretold, and so long delayed, had at last come, and alone in the sea of tumult Tehbali stood solitary as an island, the center of a circle three hundred leagues in extent, wherein raged the unchained violence of fanatical hatred and lawless passion.

Gertrude would not, however, give up hope of seeing her father. Norbert and the doctor had been careful not to let her suspect the loving deceit whereby the consul had managed to spare her the horrors of the siege, little thinking, poor man, that he had made the sacrifice of her society only to send her into greater danger.

Gertrude did not know this, and in her trustful simplicity she mounted every day to the cupola of the observatory, like another Sister Anne at her

tower, and swept the vast plain with the powerful glasses, in the vain hope of seeing the beloved form in the distance.

One day she saw, not him indeed, but a numerous troop of Arabs, wrapped in burnouses, negroes armed with spears, a whole squadron of irregular cavalry, amid which gleamed the brass of two cannons, and the steel of five hundred sabers or guns.

She hastened to inform Norbert, who had no sooner verified the news for himself than Virgil received instant orders to put Tehbali into a state of defense. The cannons were loaded, the machine guns put into position; the guard drawn up on the esplanade in readiness to repulse an attack. Virgil, at the head of a detachment of twelve men, descended to the foot of the mountain to form an outpost, with orders to fall back on the observatory if he was assailed.

Norbert surveyed the position through the telescope. At the end of an hour he saw the enemy halt, and a little group of horsemen detach themselves from the rest and advance, waving a flag of truce.

Virgil met them and led them along the peak road. Norbert was soon able to distinguish the black faces of the newcomers, as their spirited little horses, shaking their shaggy manes, which were almost as long as their tails, galloped swiftly up the zigzag route to the observatory.

At the edge of the esplanade the troop stopped short, and the chief alone, accompanied only by a trumpeter, entered the hall, where Norbert, the baronet, and the doctor awaited him.

He was richly dressed; the saber that hung by his side was exquisitely embossed, and a sparkling aigrette surmounted his turban. Norbert advanced courteously a few steps to meet him, and, addressing him in terms of warm welcome, asked wherefore he had come to Tehbali.

"Art thou the chief?" inquired the barbarian, in evident astonishment that no outward sign of authority was apparent about Norbert.

"I am the chief," replied Norbert, with dignity. "Who has sent thee to me?"

"I come," said the Arab, drawing himself up to his full height, "on the part of the holy prophet, the most high and powerful lord, the Mahdi!"

He stopped, as if to enjoy the effect he thought these words would doubtless produce. He evidently expected that at the sacred name of the holy prophet every head would be bowed in the dust. But instead of the respectful fear to which he was accustomed, he saw a mocking smile on the doctor's lips, whilst Norbert, with the slightest of bows, simply asked:

"What does the Mahdi want from us?"

"This," said the Arab, with gleaming eyes; "the Mahdi summons the unbelievers of Tehbali to surrender at discretion, and come to his camp at Omdurman, there to embrace the Mussulman faith."

"Is that all?" muttered the doctor.

"And what right has the Mahdi to send us such a summons?" asked Norbert.

"The right of his divine mission," answered the Arab. "And for those who refuse to recognize this, the right of the strongest!"

"Well, then," replied Norbert, "go and tell your master that we know him not, nor wish to know him; tell him that it is in nowise the part of a shepherd of men to provoke those who are not his enemies, and have never done harm to any of his; add, moreover, that it is an intolerable piece of impudence to offer terms of capitulation before giving battle."

"Have I heard aright?" cried the Arab. "Darest thou defy the Mahdi, after refusing his magnanimous offer?"

"I defy no one, but I ask to be left in peace to pursue my work."

"Woe to you!" said the envoy. "Accuse no one but yourself of the ruin that shall overtake you."

Turning on his heel, he went without another word to rejoin his escort at the edge of the esplanade, where he threw himself into his saddle and rode down the Peak road, turning round once towards the observatory with a threatening and insulting gesture.

He had scarcely gone out of sight around the first zigzag when a great uproar arose on the esplanade. Virgil's voice was heard high above the rest in tones of violent rage. Norbert hastened to the spot, and found his trusty lieutenant striving in vain to hold back the guard, who were hurrying after the envoys.

"The prophet has spoken, and we will not remain with the infidels," said one of the negroes.

"It is a disgrace!" retorted Virgil. "Desert your flag in this way! I will blow out the brains of the first who tries to pass."

"Virgil," said Norbert, "no violence! Call Chaka at once, and have two or three of these men put in irons."

But the negro burst into an insolent laugh.

"That's it," he said. "Call Chaka, and may all whom thou callest to thy aid respond as he will to thy appeal."

And before Virgil had time to guess his intentions, he bounded over him like a panther, and hurried down the road.

"What does all this mean?" asked Norbert.

"Nothing good, I fear," replied Virgil. At the same moment Chaka came with the remainder of the *meu*, and advancing alone toward Norbert, said in a loud voice:

"Lord of Tehbali, I had sworn fealty to thee. Thou didst spit in my hand, and Chaka respects covenants. But thou hast broken this one. The death of Kaddour lies between us. Thou art powerful, but thou art as nothing beside him who made the corn to grow before my eyes. All is over between us. Strive not to retain us. Farewell! The Prophet calls, and we obey his voice."

Norbert saw at a glance that there was nothing to be done in the face of such a decision. Had these men attacked him, he could have met force with force; but what could he do to those who simply refused service and forswore their contract? He went back to the hall in silence, while the guard defiled before Chaka and went off down the road.

This defection made matters serious. At the head of a compact little troop Norbert might have defied the Mahdi. But now that he had only

himself to depend upon, and the assistance, such as it was, of the doctor, the baronet, Virgil and Smith, diplomacy appeared the wiser course to adopt.

He made up his mind, therefore, to send Mabrouki at once to the Mahdi's camp to offer to treat on honorable terms—to pay, if necessary, double the amount of tribute that he had paid the Mogaddem, so as to be left in peace to go on with his work. He had learned by experience that gold was almighty even in the desert, and he thought it best to try every measure before proceeding to extremes.

Mabrouki started off, with orders to reach Omdurman before the envoys, if possible, and with full powers to negotiate with the Mahdi.

Meantime the garrison of the observatory was reduced to five men; and there were three prisoners to be guarded in the furnace at the foot of the mountain.

But the departure of the guard was not to be the only disaster caused by the visit of the Mahdist envoy. It was followed by the loss of the greater number of the laborers and the glass-makers, who left the workshops in crowds, whether to join the Mahdi or from fear of his vengeance should they remain at Tehbali, no one knew.

It was a cruel disappointment to Norbert, just when the sheet of glass under Tehbali already overflowed so that ten or twelve more yards would have completed the isolation of the peak. He was almost disheartened. So near the completion of his efforts, with every reason to believe that a week more of regular work would suffice to accomplish the end he had in view, and, on a sudden, to find himself deserted by the best men in his army of workers!

He thought night and day how he could possibly, by mere force of will, overcome this new difficulty; but it was all in vain; look at the question from whatever aspect he chose, no substitute offered itself for the missing hands, and he was at his wits' end.

Day by day he grew thinner and paler, and he could not sleep at night from the anxiety and worry of mind. So much trouble and hard work! Was it to be all in vain, and the money thrown away?

"Surely not!" said Norbert.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when Virgil rushed in.

"Grand news, sir! The sheet of glass has overflowed on the west side."

The fact was of the greatest importance, and Norbert hastened to the foot of the mountain to verify the report. It was true. The sheet of glass had at length filled up the depths in the center of the pyritic base, and had joined the other end of the circle, thus making it complete.

The liquid stream overflowed the rocky mass, and lay before them, surrounded by the sand heaps, in a glutinous, soft sheet, that soon would be hard and vitrified. It was done. There was no doubt about the matter. The Peak of Tehbali—the enormous rock of bisulphide of iron—was isolated from its sandy subsoil by a sheet of glass. It was isolated even from the terrestrial globe.

There, at length, was the colossal magnet dreamed of by Norbert Mauny. It lay before them an inert mass seemingly, but yet full of power, that

wanted only the stimulus of electricity to render it irresistible. And this would be supplied without delay, if need were.

Everything was in readiness. Norbert had but to give the order, and the solar heat condensers that stood stationed at intervals along the circular passage would set all the dynamos at work. The least sign from him, and the lever would act on the Motor A and establish contact.

At last, then, the magnet of Tehbali was a reality. Nay, it was more; it was a new agent among the enormous forces that regulate the planetary system!

The success, although foreseen, was dazzling indeed, and Norbert might be pardoned an involuntary sense of proud self satisfaction at so complete a realization of his aspirations. He recovered his usual calmness of demeanor, however, and, when he entered the observatory, he told Virgil simply to bring up all the heat condensers, as they were no longer needed below.

CHAPTER XXIII.—THE EXPERIMENT COMMENCES.

THE Mahdist invasion was gradually and surely spreading on all sides. The inhabitants of the desert are very methodical in their doings, and take time to look before they leap; but the circle was gradually closing in round Tehbali. In three days all the approaches were blocked, and camps of observation were to be seen posted on the surrounding heights. The peak was now completely invested.

But our friends had not been idle. All the condensers had been taken up to the circular passage. The connecting wires of the electro dynamos were in readiness to be attached to the shafts moved by the pistons of the cylinders in the center of each conical mirror. It only rested with Norbert to order the contact to be established, and in less than ten minutes the grand experiment would begin.

Strange to say, the young scientist hesitated at this last moment. He shrank from putting the final touch to the work he had so ardently and patiently carried out. He said to himself:

"Who knows but that after all I may have made a mistake? It is true that I have made every possible calculation, and, as I think, have foreseen every contingency. But what if some forgotten detail should subvert the whole theory, and give the lie to all my expectations? How could I bear to see such a humiliating and shameful end of all my plans, and before Gertrude, too, who believes in me! Before the baronet, who does *not* believe in me! Before the formidable Mahdi, and in the face of scoffing Europe herself! What if my success should be but partial, on the other hand, and just save my self conceit, but fail to realize the scheme in its entirety!"

Another consideration encouraged him in his passive attitude. The moon would not be in perigee—that is to say, nearest to the earth—for another sixty seven days. It was evident that the experiment would have a greater chance of success then; and prudence, therefore, counseled delay, unless, indeed, some unexpected turn of events forced him to precipitate matters.

The unexpected soon came, however.

On the sixth day after the arrival under the walls of Tehbali of the left wing of the Mahdists, who had turned aside from the siege of Khartoum to assail the peak, it became evident that an assault was preparing.

Horsemen went and came from one camp to another; tribes formed themselves into columns; tom toms resounded on every side, and thousands of weapons gleamed in the sunshine. On a sudden one of the columns got into marching order and drew toward the village of Tehbali, now entirely deserted by its inhabitants. The other columns proceeded eastward and northward in the direction of the peak.

There was not a moment to be lost in checking this movement. One of the cannons behind a little earth mound on the esplanade was pointed on the village, which the south column had now almost reached.

"Fire!" said Norbert.

The cannon ball flew through the air and fell, bursting behind the attacking column. It was not a bad shot for a first attempt. None of the assailants were hit, but they were panic stricken by the noise in their rear, and they fled in disorder. The other columns followed their example.

For two or three days they gave no more sign of life. Soon, however, they were seen working hard at planting cannon batteries on the adjacent heights, and on the seventh day of the assault one of these batteries opened fire.

Not a single cannon ball so much as touched the observatory, which stood much higher than the guns of the besiegers. But several projectiles fell upon the furnaces and the other buildings at the base of the peak, and it was clear that the enemy aimed especially at destroying the works.

This was too much for Norbert's philosophy. His lonely plateau was to him the whole world, and so, on the second day of the bombardment, he resolved to see for himself what harm had been done. Taking advantage of the time of siesta, when even the cannon's voice was silenced, and all the world slept, besiegers as well as besieged, he went alone and on foot, cautiously down the mountain.

There was not much harm done, but still quite sufficient to disquiet him. He came to a sudden resolution to try the final coup at once.

"Virgil," he said, on his return to the summit, "join the connecting wires to the shafts of the heat condensers."

It was now forty eight minutes past two o'clock. A searching sun shone right down on the Bayouda Desert. Virgil set about his work undisturbed. At the end of half an hour he returned to the Gallery of Telescopes, where Norbert was observing the sky, and announced that all the heat condensers were at work.

According to the calculations it took five minutes for the maximum effect of the machines to be attained, and a quarter of an hour to charge the accumulators. This done, the action could be kept up continually day and night.

Norbert waited twenty minutes, watch in hand, and then went to the Hall of Motors.

Here he found Sir Bucephalus, reading the latest number of the *Times*.

"You have forgotten a very important point, my dear Mauny," he said. "We ought to have established a pigeon post to bring up the latest news. If we only had that, I should not much mind the siege so far."

"The siege will soon be raised," replied Norbert, smiling. "I have made up my mind to act, if it were only to terrify those wretches."

Sir Bucephalus looked at him speechless with surprise and curiosity. Norbert simply walked to the right wall, took hold of the ivory knob of the Moter A and slowly lowered it. An electric tinkle was at once heard.

"Contact is made and the experiment commences," said Norbert, with more emotion than he cared to show. "It is now," he continued, looking at his timepiece, "exactly thirty eight minutes and fourteen seconds past three o'clock."

CHAPTER XXIV.—THE DESCENT OF THE MOON.

THE baronet waited a little while before speaking. Then, finding that the little electric twinkle had ceased without any apparent result, he walked to the window, stifling a laugh.

At that moment the moon, in her first quarter, appeared in the horizon, plainly discernible, although it was still broad daylight.

"It seems to me that the Queen of the Night wants a good deal of pressing, and does not trouble about us much!" said he, turning to Norbert.

"You are making a slight mistake," continued Norbert. "Matters cannot go quite so fast. Have you forgotten the distance that separates us from that moon? It will take her not less than six days, eight hours, twenty one minutes, and forty six seconds to come down to us, if I have calculated rightly. You see we have plenty of time to prepare to receive her."

The baronet said nothing, but was evidently far from being convinced. Norbert did not insist.

"Excuse me," he said, a moment later; "I am going to take a measurement with the telescope."

Going into the Hall of Telescopes, he seated himself at his place of observation in order to make a note of the micrometrical measure of the disk as it appeared then. No further allusion was made in the course of the day to the progress of the experiment.

Night came. The condensers had naturally ceased to work when no longer supplied by the sun. But the accumulators, set in motion by the simple turning of a lever, had automatically supplied the place of these machines, and so the magnet of Tehbali was constantly fully charged, as shown by the magnetometer.

Every one retired to rest at midnight, as usual, with the exception of the doctor, who was on guard on the esplanade to keep a lookout on the movements of the enemy, and Norbert, who chose to keep him company.

The moon set at nineteen minutes after two in the morning. Just before she reached the western edge of the horizon, Norbert left the doctor, and went to the observatory to take a fresh measurement. *He discovered that the moon's diameter was increased by the thirtieth of a degree.*

He would have been much surprised not to have made this discovery. And yet he had doubted up to this very moment ; but now all doubt was at an end.

In less than eleven hours the moon had already come appreciably nearer to the earth. The problem was solved. The undertaking was accomplished. The magnet of Tehbali was having the expected effect, and by its added power increasing the attraction of the terrestrial globe.

Norbert was at first almost stunned by the startling success of his efforts.

He must have been in a kind of vertigo all night, for on waking in the morning he found himself stretched on a sofa, head aching and limbs bruised, without any recollection of how he came there.

He ran to the magnetometer. The tension was still at the maximum. The sun was rising, and would set the parabolic mirrors in action. There was no reason why the experiment should not go on to the end by itself. How impatiently did the young astronomer await the return of the moon to continue his observations.

She rose that day at thirty six minutes after four o'clock in the afternoon. Long before the time Norbert had his eye glued to the telescope, in readiness to take a fresh measurement. No sooner did she appear above the horizon than it became perfectly clear that it would be quite useless to take a micrometric measurement, for since the evening before her diameter had more than *doubled*. She now described an arc of one degree, six minutes, twenty eight seconds.

The increase was so remarkable that everyone was struck by it. Soon groups of Arabs stood about the plain, contemplating the moon with astonishment. Doubtless they considered the phenomenon to be a favorable augury, for they did not seem to be in the least terrified.

At three o'clock in the morning, shortly before the moon set, Norbert discovered that her diameter had again increased, and now measured nearly two degrees.

On the third day the moon appeared in the east at forty two minutes after five o'clock. It was not as yet very bright, the sun now being in the west, but the circumference was immense ; the moon now described an arc of nine degrees ! That is to say, forty full moons of this size would have sufficed, if close together, to fill up the entire circumference of the horizon.

When evening came, and the sun, having set a little before seven, left the enormous lunar globe reigning alone in the heavens, a feeling of indescribable dread came to all who looked at her. She was, be it remembered, only as yet in the eleventh day of lunation.

In the abnormal moonlight, almost as bright as day, they could discern from the top of the terrace the behavior of the Arabs in the plain below. Prostrated on the earth with extended arms, the Mahdists were evidently disturbed. The sound of the tom tom could be plainly heard, and in the still evening air the voices of the imams and dervishes floated up, as in deep earnest tones they implored aloud the Divine protection.

These supplications went on all night until about thirty seven minutes past three in the morning, when the moon disappearing beneath the horizon,

the Arabs concluded that the prophet had heard them, and had blessed their cause.

This assumption on their part was a disappointment to Norbert. It was clear that they had been terrified, yet not sufficiently so to make them give up their enterprise.

Howbeit, when the moon rose on the following day at forty five minutes past six in the evening, occupying twenty one degrees, or nearly a quarter of the half circle of the horizon, the Arabs recommenced their *salaams* and prayers, but evinced no intention of raising the siege of Tehbali.

The moon now filled up, so to say, all one side of the heavens, with the exception of a blue space between her edge and the horizon. She was nearly round, and white as milk, the protuberances on her surface standing out plainly. With the naked eye could be seen chains of mountains, plains dotted over with mountainous peaks and yawning craters, great blue spaces that were either oceans or deserts, coasts bristling with cliffs, frowning rocks, and deep abysses.

With the telescope far more was discernible. The least detail of the landscape appeared as plainly as does the earth when viewed from a balloon.

Any doubt that Gertrude may have entertained concerning the correctness of the lunar photographs adorning the observatory walls was now entirely dissipated, for in the planet now drawing so near she beheld all the notable features of the lunar map as photographed, standing out clearly and distinctly.

The evening was passed in admiration of these marvels, until a little before midnight, the edge of the disk having reached the western horizon, the planet began to slowly disappear, an operation that lasted four hours, and took twenty minutes longer than had been the case when it rose in the morning.

They had reached the fifth day of the experiment, and no one had seemed to be disturbed by it. The Arabs had become so accustomed to the phenomenon that it was now only by way of a formula that they continued the ceremonies of the first evening, while as to the besieged, they looked out for the moon each evening with the utmost impatience to examine afresh the marvels displayed through the telescope.

But when that evening, at forty four minutes past seven, the planet of the night appeared on the eastern horizon, every one was transfixed with awe at its formidable appearance. It now occupied more than half the circle; or, to speak more correctly, the diameter now described an arc of 92 degrees, fifteen minutes and twenty two seconds.

What was still more alarming, only the edge of the disk now was fringed, as it were, with a silvery light, while all the rest appeared an immense solid dark body, *whose convexity was clearly perceptible*. For the first time one had the impression of a monstrous globe coming to meet the earth.

And yet, as Norbert explained to his friends, they would not have felt this impression if the globe had not still been at a considerable distance. But all the same, they, like the Arabs, suffered an unusual feeling of oppression, so long as the globe hung over them; and when, at thirty three minutes past four

in the morning, the heavens showed only the pale light of stars, each one breathed more freely, as if a load were lifted off him.

CHAPTER XXV.—THE FINAL CRASH.

THE sixth evening came. It was the last, since, according to Norbert's calculations, the descent of the lunar globe was to take six days eight hours and forty six seconds. The moon rose slowly, gradually filling up the whole sky. The sight was, indeed, terrible. Absolute and complete darkness reigned everywhere, with the exception of a silver band, as it were, that surrounded and held the moon above the earth.

In the Arab camp terror was at its height. Silence prevailed. The very dogs held their peace. Every man had retired to his tent, where, prostrate in the dust, he waited for death.

The thick darkness terrified the Mahdists. The moon had for a certainty come to destroy them. Yet they did not seek to fly, but remained apathetically resigned to the unprecedented catastrophe that had befallen them.

On the Peak of Tehbali the alarm was general. Norbert was almost the only one who kept his self possession. Sir Bucephalus tried to maintain his usual coolness, but, in spite of himself, the growing uneasiness he could not but feel manifested itself by continued comings and goings, and many questions.

The baronet was by no means a coward, but life was sweet to him; he was very fond of his club, and often thought with a sigh, how much he should like to be back there. He had only joined this expedition in order to have some adventures to relate, and necessarily he must survive them, otherwise how could he relate them?

The doctor took things cheerily, according to his usual habit; but he could not help querying how it would all end. Virgil never dreamed for a moment of sitting in judgment on the doings of his "superior officers;" but he thought the sky unusually black and threatening.

Smith gave full vent to his disappointment as far as the etiquette of respectful service would permit, and took care not to show his nose outside the door. As to Fatima, she cried bitterly, and Gertrude had much ado to console her, especially as she was far from being easy herself.

Matters went on tolerably well, however, until midnight. Every one was in the Hall of Motors, and Smith had just brought in the tea. Norbert, who had been to look round on the esplanade now came back, and going over to the electric lamp that hung over the table in the center, he drew out his chronometer and said:

"It is twenty two minutes past midnight. Contact will be established within a minute and twenty five seconds."

"What contact?" asked the baronet.

"That of the lunar globe with the earth."

"What! you really expect this contact to take place?"

"Of course I do. What would be the sense of the experiment otherwise? I transformed the Peak of Tehbali into a magnet on purpose to force the moon

to come down to us. Do you want me now to forego the pleasure of making her acquaintance, and send her back into space?"

"You could do it, then?"

"With the greatest ease. Simply by the means of that ivory knob yonder, marked B."

"What! The action of your magnet could be suspended simply by touching the motor B?" cried the baronet, evidently startled.

"Not precisely by touching it, but by lowering it and raising the letter A."

"In that case, my dear friend, I am of opinion that you had better use your power without delay."

"There are very good reasons, my dear Coghill, why I should not follow your advice."

"Then the moon is to *fall* upon the earth?"

"Just so."

"Will it not cause a shock?"

"Yes, for those who happen to be between the anvil and hammer certainly. But the chain of the Lunar Apennines will come into contact with the earth about a hundred leagues off, striking the Sahara from the northeast to the southwest. I expect we shall feel a sharp shock, but nothing more."

"And supposing you should be mistaken? If the shock does fall upon us?"

"In that case, of course, we shall be crushed. But I have not made a mistake. I don't know that we should be better off massacred by the Mahdi, for at all events we know what we have to expect," added Norbert, as he looked at his chronometer again. "In twenty two seconds and a half," he continued, "I expect——"

"I still think it would be wise to stop this experiment," interposed the baronet.

No sooner had he uttered these words than Smith, as if this had been the oracle long waited for, flung himself on the ebony tablet, and before any one suspected his intention, he had seized the knob A with his right hand, and the knob B with his left, and raising the former he lowered the other.

Norbert had but just time to rush upon him, exclaiming aloud in his anger and despair.

It was too late!

A fearful explosion ensued, followed by an uproar and din that can only be likened to the noise of a thousand volcanoes, or the roar of a million cannon.

There was one terrible shock, and then darkness sudden and complete. The unfortunate actors of the drama sank unconscious to the floor.

Norbert had just strength enough to cry aloud:

"Gertrude!"

But his voice had scarcely died away in the tremendous noise that prevailed when he lost consciousness of the disaster that had befallen all alike.

A. Laurie.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A CUBAN HOLD UP.

How the leisurely jaunt of two opinionated Americans was subjected to an interruption as shocking to their nerves as it was galling to their pride—The panacea developed from a mystery.

WE met them first at Matanzas, in the pretty plaza, across the marble pavement of which they were leisurely strolling; two most ravishing *Cubanas*, tall and lissome, dark of eye and brunette as to complexion.

They were not alone, for, sometimes behind them, sometimes by their side, walked a portly gray haired and white mustached gentleman, of dignified bearing and exceedingly haughty air. They, too, had an atmosphere of aristocratic breeding; but did not appear to our experienced eyes (leaving their escort out of the personal equation), to be absolutely impregnable. I fear, we must have stared, for the escort glared at us most uncompromisingly, and they gave us one astonished glance, out of the corners of their beautiful eyes, and then demurely looked the other way. Only a glance; but it was a duplex, binocular one, and it took our breath away for the space of half an hour, during which we seemed deprived of the power of speech. That this was something unusual, may be inferred from the fact that we had safely weathered several seasons at Newport and Narragansett Pier, and had never "turned a hair." But these two were a type all by themselves, we told ourselves, when we had regained our hotel and compared our impressions of the morning.

We met them a second time the very next morning; not on this earth, but beneath it, at the yawning mouth of the cave *Bella-mar*, where a party had gathered to explore the secret recesses of that wonderful cavern. Scene of yesterday re-enacted; pleading, perhaps bold glances from young men; repellent look from elderly gentleman, chaste reserve on part of the young ladies; so we went into the crystal cavern unrecognized and unacquainted.

The *Bella-mar* is a Mammoth Cave in miniature; same dark corridors, stalactitic pillars, crystal grottoes, unfathomed lakes; and finally, same "fat man's purgatory," or narrow passage between immovable rocks. We had proceeded well enough up to this point; but here occurred an accident: One of the young ladies fainted, right in mid-passage of the purgatorial pass. There was instant outcry for some sort of restorative, and fortunately I had with me a "pocket pistol," filled with that liquor "which cheers, likewise inebriates," and which I at once handed to the Cuban gentleman. Promptly applied to the young lady's lips, the generous liquor had the requisite effect, and, after she had recovered, the flask was returned, accompanied with thanks, ornately, profusely even, expressed, by the Cuban gentleman. It may have been that I expected some sort of recognition for this opportune assistance; but if so, I was destined to disappointment, for the Cubans left

without so much as a salutation by the way, as we all climbed into our volantes for the homeward journey.

Thus comes to a close the prefatory portion of my narrative, and leaves the way open for a line of introduction. Imprimis: We, that is, Tom Golding and I, had taken a voyage to Cuba for the improvement of our health, which wasn't suffering much, and for the extension of a Spanish vocabulary, which was suffering a great deal. We arrived at Havana but poorly equipped for contact with a foreign people and their language, relying chiefly upon two strong letters of introduction from the head of a prominent business house in New York, to his commercial correspondent in the interior of Cuba. As a rule, letters of introduction to Cubans and Spaniards are not worth the paper they are written on; but ours proved the exception. We received a warm welcome from the Havana representative of the planter to whom the letters were addressed, who assured us that, while Don Antonio was not then in town, he did not doubt what our reception would be. He would forward our credentials at once, and, as it would take several days for a reply to reach us, we had better "do the town," and see the sights of the Cuban capital. We had faithfully followed the agent's advice; had seen all the available lions, and then taken a run over to Matanzas, whither the expected invitations were to be forwarded.

On our return from the cave, we found at our hotel a most cordial invitation from the planter inclosed from his Havana agent, and also a passport from General Campos, permitting us to cross the trocha. Next day at noon we were on board the train for Colou, which, if it made schedule time, would drop us at a side station early in the evening. There we were to stop at a *fonda* over night, and next morning take coach for the remainder of our journey.

There was only one passenger coach on the train, and that was hitched *behind a long line of trucks and cattle cars, making travel anything but agreeable, despite the beauty of the scenery by the way.* There were few passengers, for at that time Cuba was indulging in a general scare, and travel was likely to be interrupted by insurgent raids; but to our great astonishment we observed, right in front of us, the haughty Cuban and his distractingly beautiful daughters. They were his daughters (this much we had learned) for they called him "papa," and devoted themselves most assiduously to his comfort and entertainment.

We were much depressed by this discovery, and did not recover our wonted equanimity until some distance on the journey; then, feeling tolerably sure that none of the passengers understood English, we chatted unreservedly of our various impressions. But wander as we would afield, our conversation constantly reverted to the most interesting incidents of our trip.

"Strange coincidence, or rather, a series of coincidences," I remarked.

"Which was the one who fainted, Tom—can you tell?"

"Faith, not I. They are enough alike to be twins. But if there is a more beautiful girl anywhere in the world than the one at the outside of the seat, it is the one on the inside. One of them has made an indelible impression on my heart; but hanged if I know which."

I smiled at this, for Thomas was continually receiving "indelible impressions," which invariably melted and vanished in the gleam of the next pair of eyes that looked into his.

"Yes, they are lovely, as you say; but we shall probably never see them again, and so we had best arm ourselves against the inevitable parting. Now, to change the subject, what do you think of these stories told us in Matanzas, about the Cuban women taking part in conflicts in the open field? For my part, I don't believe it is in them."

"Neither do I," sniffed Tom. "It's all tommyrot. In my opinion, the woman doesn't live who would take the chances in open battle. She just can't do it, that's all; it isn't in her. The average woman has no 'sand,' no backbone; she wasn't born that way. The men seem brave enough, both sides; but I don't believe the women have a spark of courage or patriotism; or if they have, they've most successfully concealed it."

I might have been deceived, but I thought I noted two pairs of lovely shoulders stiffen, at this remark, which could not but have been overheard, though doubtless not understood. The ladies were sitting with their backs towards us, while the father faced their seats and us, at intervals apparently dozing, but with one eye open.

"Well," I rejoined, "that isn't a very gallant remark, but perhaps the estimate of the sex isn't far wrong. However, why should it concern us, anyway, and why has our conversation taken such a turn? Now what do you think of the scenery, for instance? Aren't those beautiful palms over in the field yonder?"

"Scenery be blowed! Imray, for once in my life I'm hit, hard hit. That girl's image is engraven upon my heart, I tell you; it's stamped."

"Oh bosh! But which one's image, Tom?"

"Why—Oh, no matter. But, Jove! She's divine." Then my companion gazed out of the window with a rapt expression, which, once I saw it, precluded any attempt on my part to draw him back to things mundane and material. Meanwhile, the day passed away, and (strangest of happenings) the train arrived at the station of our destination on schedule time. We sought the *fonda*, and found it a one storied structure of adobe, with only four rooms, all on the ground floor. The landlord was dirty and greasy, as well as insolent, and seemed to take a malicious satisfaction in telling us that all his best rooms had been engaged by a Cuban gentleman for himself and daughters. But we were welcome to a bench apiece in the kitchen, though more than that he could not promise.

"Tell him to go to thunder with the kitchen bench," exclaimed Tom, in great heat of righteous indignation. But that instant he caught sight of our friends, the Cubans, just entering the hotel, and a vast change came over his wrathful countenance. "Say, old man, they're going to stop here for the night. Jove! I thought they went along. Tell the landlord to give us the bench—whatever he will. Perhaps we'll get a chance to speak with them, after all; who knows?"

But alas, they at once disappeared, and were invisible until the morning, having their meals sent to their rooms. As for us, we spent a wakeful night

on two hard benches, without either blankets or mattresses, and at daylight were only too glad to go out into the open air, to escape the fleas and to stretch our aching limbs. It was with great difficulty that I restrained Tom from making an assault upon our surly boniface, and finally got him into the *diligencia*, which was in waiting.

Even yet, when all was ready to start, we regarded the doorway of the *fonda* expectantly, hoping against hope for the reappearance of yesterday's traveling companions; and at the last moment, out walked the dignified Cuban gentleman—but alone! He climbed into the coach, the driver cracked his whip, the mules strained at the harness, and we were off, without even so much as a glimpse of the *señoritas*.

"Well, may I be blowed!" ejaculated my companion, and subsiding into a corner, didn't speak another word until—well, until it happened that he had to.

The distance to Don Antonio's *ingenio* was only twenty miles, and we had covered three fourths of it, when the event occurred. It was an open country all the way. The weary mules were jogging listlessly along, kicking up a tremendous dust in the limestone road, the old coach was squeaking dismally on its huge leather straps, and the passengers were more or less wrapped in slumber. Suddenly—well, as I have already alluded to the coming attack, I cannot spring it upon the reader as perhaps I should have done, dramatically; and will simply say that we were awakened by the muzzles of two carbines, thrust right under our noses! That is, one was stuck under my nose, and another under my companion's, and, glancing over the shining barrels, we saw two dark and threatening faces, at their hinder ends. Each highwayman had flowing whiskers and fierce mustachios, a slouched hat and a mask that half concealed his face; in fact, all the proper accessories of the typical "gentleman of the road."

Each demanded, at the same time and in the same tone, "Your money or your life!" I tried to reach around and unhitch my revolver; but there was a simultaneous and ominous click of carbine locks, and a still more dark and deepening scowl; so I desisted, and we submitted to be relieved of our purses and our pistols, which they politely, but firmly insisted upon appropriating.

It may seem cowardly, but we had to submit. It ought to have surprised me, I suppose, that the highwaymen spoke English, and devoted their exclusive attention to Tom and myself. But at that moment nothing seemed strange, and I should have thought it perfectly natural if they had spoken in Greek or Hebrew. Perhaps we were paralyzed at the suddenness of the attack; perhaps we lacked grit. Let that be as it may seem; the fact was that we were being held up in the most approved fashion.

After having gathered in our money and revolvers, the highwaymen requested us to get out of the coach, and to mount two spare horses, which at this juncture an assistant led into view. And all this time, our Cuban friend was not only unmolested, but treated with apparent deference by the bandits. Neither was anybody else in the coach disturbed, nor any plunder taken away.

After we had descended to the ground and mounted our steeds, the

treacherous driver cracked his whip, the mules started into a trot, and soon the whole outfit was lost to view in a cloud of dust. The distinguished and dignified Cuban waved his hand just before he disappeared, as though to bid us farewell; and we shook our fists in return, promising ourselves that we would get even with him if, in the orderings of Providence, our paths ever crossed again.

"The scurvy scoundrel!" muttered Tom. "I remember he said to you that there was no danger, and advised us to put our revolvers out of sight. I see his motive, now; he was in league with these rascals."

"No doubt of it," I rejoined, recalling several suspicious expressions. I should mention perhaps that while there were but two principal performers in this sad affair, yet they were supported by some half a dozen other horsemen, who stood a little aloof, yet ready to give assistance if desired. We were not maltreated, nor even strapped to our saddles; but on each side of us rode a well armed horseman, a glint of warning in his eye, and in one hand a loaded revolver. Our own weapons the highwaymen had carefully tucked into their belts, where they displayed them, with rather more of ostentation than the occasion warranted. It could not be denied that it was a humiliating capture; and though we gnashed our teeth, and vowed all sorts of vengeance, we went along peaceably in the direction indicated by our guides. Close behind us rode the supernumeraries, and in this order we crossed the plain towards a range of hills. When we had accomplished about half the distance, I saw the diligence, not far away, swinging around a circle, of which we had traversed the diameter.

Our escort spoke but rarely, except to warn us now and then against attempting to escape. They asked us where we were going, and what we were going to do when we had got there, but offered no information as to their own intentions. They did not interdict our conversing and we had the slight satisfaction of abusing them roundly, and telling each other what we would do when we got our liberty, etc. They paid no attention to our ravings, save to smile exasperatingly, showing the whitest of teeth.

At last, after an hour's riding, we reached the summit of the hill towards which we had been aiming, and found it to be in the midst of a vast estate, surrounded on all sides by fields of sugar cane. The tall chimneys of an *ingenio* stood out black against the sky not far away, and near it was the dwelling of the proprietor, set in the midst of gardens and groves of fruit trees. On the hilltop where we halted, was a hut of palm leaves, so thickly thatched that it appeared more like a heap of wind drifted trash than an artificial shelter. It had an aperture at one side for a door, but was devoid of windows. An old negro came out of the hut as we rode up and saluted us respectfully, and after the rear guard had formed around us, we were commanded to dismount.

"Breakfast is ready, gentlemen," said the old man, as he stood aside, while we filed into the hut. There, in the dim light, we saw a long table, loaded with a substantial repast. It was not a hilarious party which gathered around the primitive board, but there was no mistaking the hospitable intent of our hosts. After the meal was over, coffee and cigarettes

were brought in, to which every one present helped himself, except the two highwaymen who had captured us. They had not, indeed, eaten or drunk at all; but, without even removing their masks, had sat opposite their captives, keenly alert to their every movement. They seemed very much relieved when breakfast was over, and hastily led the way outside.

"You will remain here," they said to us, as we were about to mount. "We will take your horses along; but the hut, the negro, and all there is here, are very much at your service. You must give your parole, however, that you will not attempt to follow us, nor to escape, until the sun has sunk below the crest of yonder hill."

"But our revolvers?" I interposed. "You may keep our purses, but we should like our weapons back."

"On the contrary," rejoined one of the pair, "we shall return your purses, and retain the revolvers. We do not intend to place weapons in your hands to use against us. You are such brave men, you know, you might do something rash. Who knows, but you might try to shoot us?" With this Parthian dart of affront, they tossed us our purses, and rode away with their friends, leaving us at the hut's door, watching them gloomily as they sped down the hill.

We hadn't minded much the loss of our purses, since each of us had a wad of bills stowed away in an inside pocket, and a belt cramed full of American eagles; but it would certainly have done us a world of good to have had a flying shot at the rascals, as they went galloping down the slope. Before they left, the two principals had approached and offered us their hands, one of them saying saucily, as we spurned them: "Oh well, the time may come when you will be glad to take them, my friends, if you can; till then, *adios*."

Tom and I, once left alone, said but little to each other, for the episode was an arrow rankling in each breast. We could not but think that we had acted more like cowards, or fools, than like the men we had thought ourselves, and hardly dared look each other in the eye. But after we had lighted our pipes and soothed ourselves with a smoke, the situation did not appear so bad, on the whole. The hut was cool and comfortable, a delicious breeze was wafted up from the sugar cane, and a beautiful view was spread out around and beneath us.

Tom first broke the silence. "Do you know, old man," said he, "I'm rather inclined to this spot, after all. If we only had a couple of hammocks and some guns, we might spend a very pleasant week here, I'm thinking. Funny though, isn't it? How the deuce did those fellows manage to rig up this outfit at such short notice? And how, in the fiend's name, came they to bring us up here and leave us in possession? It gets me! Say, ask that old nigger whose estate this is, and whom he belongs to; and particularly who our friends are."

In reply to my question the old man answered that the plantation belonged to Don Antonio Guzman, who owned as far as we could see, and much beyond.

"Guzman? Thunder and lightning! Why, that's the man we have letters

to," howled Tom. "Come on, let's go down at once, and set him after those blasted thieves and murderers. Now, we've not a minute to lose." I was equally excited, but I fortunately advised sending the negro, with a request for horses, so that, peradventure the owner of the estate was our prospective host, we might not bring the blush of shame to his brow. Tom assented finally, and we were rewarded for our forbearance, two hours later, by the appearance of a most courteous gentleman, who informed us that he was Don Antonio's major domo, and who was profuse in his expressions of regret that we should have been maltreated on his master's property. After him followed two led horses, in charge of our sable friend, to whom, as we mounted and sped away, we gave a half eagle, for the enjoyment of his hospitality.

Then we cantered down the hill which we had ascended under circumstances so entirely different, and in due time arrived at Don Antonio's door. It was then mid-afternoon, and the planter, the liveried servant told us, was indulging in a siesta. But he had been instructed to say that the house and all it contained was at our disposal, and he would show us to our rooms. We followed him across a vast and marble tiled hall, and up a broad staircase, to two cool chambers, one of which was assigned to Tom, and the other to me.

The man threw open a *jalousie*, and was seemingly about to depart, when my attention was attracted by a glittering and familiar object, on the dressing table. The servant had halted at the doorway, probably to enjoy and to report to others my amazement; but despite his presence, I allowed an emphatic exclamation to escape me. For, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that glittering object on the table was my own revolver, which had been taken from me that very morning!

Attached to the trigger guard was a card, on which was written: "Mr. Arthur Imray, with the compliments of A. G., Xmas, 1895."

And as I was hanging over it, in open mouthed amaze, my friend dashed into the room, holding his own revolver, to which, as he excitedly showed me, was attached another card, with similar inscription to mine, only with "the compliments of C. G."

"Who in the name of heaven is 'C. G.'?" Tom demanded of the servant. And I added in the same breath, "Who is 'A. G.'? What does it mean?"

"*Quien sabe?*" he said with a shrug, and a smile that was meant to be sly: "Who knows? But as to the initials, why, they are exactly those of my honored master's most beautiful daughters, the *Señoritas* Anita and Constancia. Now, if the gentlemen wish to change their clothes, they will find their valises in the wardrobes. Pardon me; I go to prepare a cooling drink for your worships." With that, the grinning *mozo* disappeared, leaving us staring at each other in deep bewilderment.

"Tom, old man," I gasped, sinking to a divan, "were you ever buncoed on the Bowery?"

"No, by Jove; but I'll freely admit that I've been buncoed in Cuba."

"Exactly my case, Tom; we've been made the victims of a deep laid scheme."

"That's evident; but what kind of a scheme, and who hatched it?"

"It's beyond me, my dear boy ; and the only suggestion I have to make is, that we dress as soon as possible, and go down for an explanation."

Less than an hour later, two very pale, but determined young men, might have been seen descending to the hall at the foot of the grand staircase. And, very near the middle of said hall, they were met by a portly, dignified Cuban gentleman, gray haired and white mustached, with an unmistakable haughty air—— But pshaw ! You must have guessed already that he was none other than our companion of the morning and of yesterday. And, leaning on each arm was a ravishingly beautiful maiden, garbed most fetchingly, with diamond bright eyes, which were deeply dark ; cheeks like damask roses, lips like cleft pomegranates, and—— But of course, you have guessed who *they* were ! I say "were," because——well, because they have since discarded their patronymic, and one is now Mrs. Anita Imray, and the other Mrs. Constancia Golding. Of course, we didn't deserve such lovely prizes ; in very truth, we had been too much humiliated to aspire at all. But, as my Anita has since confided to me, they felt they owed us something, for robbing us of our revolvers !

Having been educated at Vassar, they had understood every word we said on the train, and, with their papa's consent, resolved to resent our aspersion of Cuban women—as they chose to call it. Our meekness in affliction had excited their sympathy ; sympathy, you know, is akin to love ; love was what they wanted, though perhaps they didn't know it, then ; and the upshot of it was, that we married the highwaywomen.

Fred A. Ober.

AN ARITHMETICAL PUZZLE.

SHE flitted me and scorned my suit,
A maid of summers twenty,
A fair coquette with roguish eyes
Who had of lovers plenty.

I burned my ships and rushed away,
And voyed that I'd forget her
And once again as happy be
As if I'd never met her.

Though years and years have passed since then,
Though I've had sweethearts plenty,
My earliest ideal love
To me still seems but twenty.

And strange to say when yesterday
I met this maid and told her
My foolish fancy, she but frowned
And claimed to be no older.

THE MUTINY ON THE FLYING CLOUD.*

Thrilling experiences among the islands of the Western Pacific—The hostage chosen by the pirates to coerce the first mate—What befell when the Malays attacked the stockade on Refuge Island.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

THE clipper ship *Flying Cloud*, Captain Blake commanding, is en route between New York and Australia, with seven passengers: Dr. Henderson, his wife, little child Lucy and his wife's sister, Sibyl Stanley; also Mr. Grant, a civil engineer, with his wife and seven year old son Percy. After crossing the line the chief mate, Bryce, is lost overboard and Ned Wilson, scarcely twenty, is advanced to the post, while Robert Manners, who is no older, is made second officer. Meantime Josh Williams, one of the able seamen, fomented discontent among the crew and one night Captain Blake and Manners are seized, bound and placed in captivity, while Williams makes clear to Ned Wilson that the price of the safety of the women and children among the passengers is his promise to faithfully navigate the ship to the best of his ability for the mutineers.

Williams proposes to put the passengers ashore on one island and the two ship's officers on another, but several days elapse before land that seems suitable is sighted. Finally one about six miles long is selected and the passengers are sent off in two boats. At the last moment Sibyl Stanley is detained from accompanying her friends, Williams arguing that she must be held to insure Ned's trustworthiness. Captain Blake and Manners are landed on another island, and soon afterwards the *Flying Cloud* is put in at a third one, having a safe harbor between tall cliffs, screening her from all observation. Ned, while off on an exploring trip with Sibyl, finds a cave containing thousands of dollars' worth of gold, a discovery which they determine to keep from the knowledge of the mutineers. Meantime, after Mr. Grant has chanced upon the wreck of a vessel, the *Mermoid*, the party on Refuge Island set to work building a raft, a task which is completed satisfactorily at the end of a month.

CHAPTER XX.—THE RAFT'S FIRST VOYAGE.

THE settlers on Refuge Island were now in a position to attack the wreck in good earnest, which they did by rigging up a pair of shears on deck and hoisting the cargo from the ship's hold and depositing it directly on the raft alongside. The cargo proved to be, as had been expected, a general cargo—that is to say, it consisted of more or less of almost every conceivable product of a civilized country, from lucifer matches up to railway plant and machinery.

It was a very difficult matter to decide what might, and what might not, be of value to the party, and the result was that they eventually determined to land the entire cargo. Of course only a very small portion of it would go into the shed which they had erected; but this was a matter of no very great moment, for a great deal of it was of such a nature that rain would not materially injure it.

It took them another month to empty the wreck, and then they set about the task of breaking her up.

*This story began in the January issue of *THE ARGOSY*. The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.

To break up a ship is, under ordinary circumstances, no very difficult matter, but as they expected that they would be dependent almost entirely upon the wreck for the timber necessary to the construction of their little ship, they had to go carefully to work ; and as it was all manual labor, and as they were very short handed, they found the task one of no ordinary difficulty.

At length, however, after nearly another month's arduous toil, they had cut her down to the water's edge, and there they were obliged to leave her.

Hitherto they had not allowed themselves time to investigate very closely the nature of the cargo which they had so laboriously conveyed to the shore, their chief anxiety being to secure from the wreck every scrap likely to be of the slightest use to them, before the change of the season and the break up of the weather should render this impossible. Now, however, they had leisure to give their booty a thorough overhaul ; and this was the next task to which they devoted themselves.

As, however, they were now no longer pressed for time, and one man could easily do most of what was required to be done in that way, it was arranged that Dr. Henderson, should examine the cargo as far as he could, and prepare a detailed list of the various goods and articles of which it was composed ; whilst Grant and Nicholls should proceed in the raft on a trip of exploration round the bay, for the purpose of discovering an outlet in the reef which the former believed to exist, and if such an outlet could be found, to proceed through it and make a short trial trip to sea for the purpose of testing the sailing qualities of the raft.

On the morning following the completion of their work of dismemberment, therefore, these two tasks were taken in hand. Such cases and packages as it was thought the doctor would have a difficulty in breaking open unaided were attacked by the three men, and their contents laid bare ; and then Grant and Nicholls got on board the raft—which was berthed at a short distance from the beach and made thoroughly secure by being moored with the ship's smallest anchor—and, hoisting her huge lateen sail, cast off from the mooring buoy, and proceeded to execute a few trial evolutions preparatory to the exploration of the reef.

The mode of working the raft under sail was, as has already been intimated, the same in principle with that in vogue among the Ladrone Islanders—that is to say, the vessel was sailed indifferently with either end foremost, the sail being always kept on the same side of the mast. This is probably the most simple form of craft known to navigating mankind.

This was the first occasion upon which it had had a fair trial, and it was found to answer admirably, the raft proving to be not only so stiff as to be absolutely uncapsizable, but also remarkably fast considering her shape, a speed of six knots being got out of her unloaded and with a good fresh breeze blowing.

As soon as the somewhat novel mode of working her had been satisfactorily tested, the exploration of the reef was begun in earnest. They cruised along its inner edge to the southward in the first instance, and discovered several places where it would probably have been possible for them to pass out

to sea; but in every case the channels, if, indeed, they were worthy of the name, were so narrow and tortuous that Grant had no fancy for attempting them unless as a last resource.

They next tried the northern side of the bay, and here they were more successful, for just where the reef seemed to join the land there was a channel of about one hundred feet in width, nearly straight, and trending in a north-westerly direction, with so much water in it that the sea only broke in one or two places throughout its entire length. This channel was all that they could desire; for as the prevailing wind seemed to be about southwest, they were enabled to pass in and out of the bay with the sheet slightly eased off.

Standing through this channel, which was only about a quarter of a mile long, they soon found themselves in the open sea, with a considerable amount of swell, over which the raft rode with a buoyancy which was most satisfactory to her designer.

If Grant had any doubt whatever about the strength of any portion of his novel construction, it was in the transverse bracing which connected the bottoms of his two pontoons, and he was therefore rather anxious for the first ten minutes or quarter of an hour after he found himself fairly in the open sea. But the bracing was found amply sufficient to give the required rigidity, and this fact once demonstrated he kept away before the wind, and coasted along the northern shore of the island, keeping at a sufficient distance from the tremendously lofty cliffs to prevent his being becalmed.

With the wind over her quarter the raft traveled remarkably fast, and within an hour of the time when she passed out through the channel she was abreast of the entrance to the river—which, by the way, was so effectually masked that Grant actually ran past it, and arrived off a point which they had seen from their original landing place before he became aware of the fact.

Retracing his way, the engineer, after a careful search, found the opening and passed into the river. Their course for the first two miles was dead to windward; but the raft sailed remarkably near the wind, and held her own even better than her designer had believed to be possible—the long, flat sides of the two pontoons seeming to act the parts of leeboards, preventing her from making any perceptible leeway.

They reached the lake, sailed round the islet, landed there, and procured a liberal supply of fruits of various descriptions, which seemed to grow more luxuriantly and of finer flavor there than on the mainland, and then embarking once more made the best of their way back to the bay, where they anchored the raft and proceeded on shore in a small boat, which had been built as a sort of tender to the larger craft.

They found Henderson still busy with his examination of the cargo, and Grant was highly delighted with its multifarious character. There were many articles which he foresaw would be of the utmost use to them in the construction of their little ship, but perhaps the find which delighted him most was a large circular saw.

When his eye fell upon this, his vivid imagination at once pictured it as in operation in a mill erected upon a spot which he had already recognized as

most suitable for the purpose ; and he saw, too, that now they need no longer be dependent upon the old ship timber, full of bolt and treenail holes, for the timber and planking of their craft, as they would be enabled with the assistance of the saw to provide themselves with all the planking, and, indeed, timber of every description which would be necessary in their work, from the magnificent teak and other trees which grew in such abundance on the island.

CHAPTER XXI.—CAPTAIN BLAKE AND MANNERS REAPPEAR.

HAVING now secured from the wreck every scrap which it was possible to obtain, the little party on Refuge Island had more leisure than they had had since the moment of their landing ; for there was now no longer any fear that if a gale sprang up they would sustain any material loss.

True, the greatest part of their work still remained to be done ; but there was no longer the same necessity for hurry that there had been whilst any portion of the cargo remained at the mercy of wind and wave, and they therefore resolved that in future they would take matters a little more easy.

The next portion of their task consisted in the conveyance of everything landed from the wreck round to the islet.

The men of the party were by this time beginning to feel that of late they had somewhat overworked themselves ; they needed rest and they determined to indulge in a couple of days' holiday before engaging in the task of transhipment.

Up to this time the ladies had found themselves unable to render any very material assistance ; yet they had not been altogether idle, for under Dr. Henderson's directions, and with his assistance, they had succeeded in luring into large wicker work baskets, which the doctor had very ingeniously framed, the whole of the fowls ; the capture consisting of three cocks, fourteen or fifteen hens, and a couple of broods of chickens. With a little careful management they now believed they need never be at a loss for eggs, or even an occasional dinner of roast fowl.

During the two days of holiday which the men permitted themselves, Henderson employed himself in wandering about the island, gun in hand, in search of botanical and natural history specimens ; and he not only secured several rare birds, the skins of which he managed to cure, but also some very valuable medicinal plants.

Grant and Nicholls, on the other hand, chose to devote their time to a further and more complete examination of the island, the result being that they discovered a very much more suitable site for the shipbuilding yard than the one already fixed upon—a spot which, though somewhat further away from the spot where they had intended to build their house, was much more secure and less liable to discovery by an enemy, should such unhappily make his appearance.

Nothing worthy of mention occurred during these two days, and on the morning of the third, work was once more resumed with a will. The task of reloading the raft proved, as had been anticipated, a somewhat laborious one.

Their first idea had been that, instead of discharging on the beach, it would be better to convey the goods direct from the wreck round to the islet. The loss of time which this would involve seemed to them so serious that, rather than incur it and the risk which might possibly result therefrom, they had decided to put up with the inconvenience and the extra labor of an additional handling of all their goods.

The real value of the raft and the wisdom which had suggested her construction now became apparent, for she made two, and sometimes three, trips a day between the west bay and Grant Island, as they had named their islet home, with loads averaging about ten tons on each trip.

The day at length arrived when this part of their task drew so near its completion that they expected to finish the transfer before evening; and on this particular day they experienced a most agreeable surprise.

As the raft, with Grant and Nicholls on board, was running down with its last load, Nicholls caught sight of what he took to be a tiny sail in the offing to the northward, to which he drew Grant's attention.

The latter, who usually carried his telescope with him, at once brought the instrument to bear upon the object, and found that Nicholls was right; and it was indeed a sail.

The craft, a very small one, was some four miles to leeward when first descried, and notwithstanding the loss of time which such a step would involve, the engineer promptly bore up to examine it.

As the two craft closed with each other, it was seen that the small sail was heading in for the island, and a few minutes later she was made out to be an outrigger canoe with two persons on board.

Her construction was of so primitive a character that Grant naturally expected to find that the persons on board her were natives, who had possibly been blown off the land, and, failing to make their own island again, had perhaps been wandering aimlessly about the ocean for many days. What was his surprise, then, when he observed one of the individuals rise in the canoe and lift something to his shoulder, the movement being followed by a flash, a little puff of smoke, and the faint report of a gun.

Keeping his glass fixed upon the canoe, Grant next observed that the individual who had fired the gun was gesticulating violently, the gesticulations being such as to convey the idea of rejoicing.

A few minutes later the raft was so close to the canoe that the engineer, almost doubting the evidence of his senses, was able to identify the two persons in the latter as none other than Captain Blake and young Manners.

At the proper moment the raft was rounded to, the canoe shot alongside, and Captain Blake, closely followed by young Manners with the canoe's painter in his hand, sprang upon the raft and gave Grant a hearty hand grasp.

"My dear fellow!" he exclaimed, "how are you? And you, too, Nicholls, my lad—I did not expect to see *you* here! How are you my good fellow? Well, Mr. Grant," he continued, "this is the happiest day I have known since the mutiny. I am heartily glad to meet you once more, sir, and to see you looking so well. And how"—with a slight show of hesitation—"how are the rest of your party?"

"All perfectly well, thank you; and as happy as can reasonably be expected under the circumstances," answered Grant. "But where on earth have you come from?" he continued; "and how did you manage to effect your escape from the *Flying Cloud*?"

"We have come from a bit of an island away yonder, one hundred miles or so to the eastward of the spot where we now are. And we did not escape from the *Flying Cloud* at all, sir—John Blake is not the sort of man to voluntarily desert his ship as long as she will hang together or float with him—no; we were simply shoved ashore by those scoundrels of mutineers, and left to shift for ourselves as best we might. And a precious poor shift it would have been, I can tell you, but for Ned, who—fine fellow that he is—managed somehow to scrape together for us not only a fair supply of food, but also arms, a few tools, and nails enough to knock that bit of a canoe together. He gave us the exact position of your island, and told us that we might possibly get a sight of the top of yonder mountain on a clear day—which as a matter of fact we did, once or twice—so that I knew exactly how to steer. And so you are all in good health, eh? Well, I am delighted to hear that. And where are the rest of your party? It will be a pleasant sight for my eyes when they rest upon the ladies and those dear children once more—bless their innocent little hearts!"

"You shall see them in good time—in the course of two or three hours—as soon as we have landed our cargo and can work back to the western end of the island, where our camp is at present located," answered Grant, with a smile. "But tell me," he continued, "before our conversation drifts away from the subject, where and how is Miss Stanley?"

"She is—or was, when I saw her last—on board the *Flying Cloud*," answered the skipper. "You must understand that I was landed from the ship on the day following that on which they put you ashore here; so I know nothing whatever about what may have happened to her since then. But they let me wish her good by before I was lauded, and I had a few minutes' conversation with her; and, from what passed then, and in a chat I previously had with Ned, I am in hope that she is as safe as a girl can be in the hands of such a set of ruffians. But, at best, her situation is a very terrible one, and I would give my right hand this moment to see her safe once more among us. And now, tell me, what have you been doing all the time, and what is the meaning of this raft and her cargo?"

Grant, in reply, gave a pretty fully detailed account of all that they had done, and of their future plans; winding up by expressing the exceeding satisfaction he felt that the little party would now be benefited by the aid and advice of two such valuable auxiliaries as the skipper and young Manners.

Captain Blake listened most attentively to everything the engineer told him—the raft meanwhile being worked to windward toward the harbor's mouth—and when he had heard everything, he remarked:

"Well, so far you have done admirably; I do not believe matters could have been managed better had I been here myself. And as to this raft of yours—if raft you call her—she is simply a wonder; why, she turns to windward like a racing cutter. I am sure I should never have dreamed of

scheming out anything half so handy. You engineers are very clever people, there is no denying that, and can even give an old salt like myself a wrinkle now and then, as I have learned from today. But now, to say a word or two about the future. You tell me that this is your last cargo, and that on your next trip you propose to transfer all hands to this bit of an islet that lies away inland there somewhere. Now, let me ask you, have you had any craft of any description prowling about in the neighborhood lately?"

"We have not sighted a sail of any description since we saw the *Flying Cloud's* canvas sink below yonder horizon," answered Grant, pointing to the eastward.

"So much the better," said the skipper; "and I am right glad to hear it. These waters, as you may perhaps know, are not often traversed by the craft of civilized nations; indeed, so far as I can make out, we are quite out of all the regular ship tracks. But Manners and I have been alarmed on two or three occasions on our own island yonder by the appearance of proas—a class of craft which, I may tell you, are usually manned by Malays, or savages of a somewhat similar race and character; and if any such should come prying about here they will certainly beat up our quarters and give us no end of trouble. Indeed, to speak the whole truth, my dear fellow, I would as soon be in the hands of a crew of mutineers as in theirs. So, if you will listen to my advice, our first job should be the building of a house large enough to accommodate all hands; and, if possible, it should be so fortified as to enable us to hold out with some chance of success against such an attack as those fellows would be likely to make in the event of their looking in here."

CHAPTER XXII.—A NEW ALARM.

THE captain's warning was news indeed, the gravity and importance of which it would be difficult to overestimate. Grant already knew something of the Malays by reputation; and he was aware that Captain Blake was speaking no more than the truth when he asserted that the party would be certainly no worse off in the hands of the mutineers than they would be in those of a horde of Malay pirates, whose calling only fosters their natural propensity for rapine and bloodshed.

He had heard one or two perfectly hideous stories of atrocities committed by those wretches when unfortunate ship's crews had fallen into their hands. And he shuddered, and his blood ran cold as his vivid imagination pictured the women and children of the party in the hands and at the mercy of such a band.

In this, as in every other case of difficulty or danger, the safety and welfare of the women and children would naturally be the first consideration; and Grant's first mental question was how would they be affected by these tidings. It was true, he reflected, that the proas might *not* visit the island; but, as it was evident that they were cruising in the neighborhood, it would be the height of folly to rely upon chance in such a matter. And he forthwith began to turn over in his mind what would be the best steps to take in the emergency.

It would be possible for the weaker members of the party to find concealment somewhere among the spurs of the mountain ; but any such arrangement as this, whilst highly inconvenient, would be open to many other disadvantages. And Grant could not help thinking of what their fate would be, supposing that whilst lying thus concealed the men of the party should be attacked and made captive or slain. Were such a catastrophe as this to befall them, the fate of those poor women and children would be little better than a living death ; left as they would be to shift for themselves unaided, unprotected, and their hearts wrung with anguish for the loss of those to whom they were naturally in the habit of looking for help and protection, and with little or no chance of ultimate escape from their island prison.

To add to the difficulties of the situation, the little party were so short handed that to construct such a fortified habitation as Blake had suggested would be, if not an absolute impossibility, a work of such time and labor that for all practical purposes it might as well be unattempted.

This was no case of ordinary difficulty ; it was not a difficulty which could be overcome by the skilful and judicious application of a practically unlimited supply of manual labor. And almost for the first time in his life the engineer found himself confronted with a question which he was unable to satisfactorily answer.

Whilst the engineer was still revolving this difficult matter in his mind the raft arrived at her usual berth at Grant Island, and her cargo was as rapidly as possible discharged ; after which she sailed at once for the western settlement.

Here the unexpected appearance of Captain Blake and Rob Manners was greeted with every manifestation of surprise and delight ; and the former had, as a matter of course, to recount to his interested friends the whole story of his sojourn upon, and escape from the island upon which the pair had been landed.

The ladies were naturally most anxious to learn the latest news concerning Miss Stanley ; and the wary skipper, whilst telling them what little he knew about her, did his best to allay their fears with regard to that young lady, carefully concealing his own somewhat gloomy anticipations as to her future. And so successfully did he manage this business that Mrs. Henderson's heart was considerably lightened of the load which had for so long a time been secretly pressing upon it.

As soon as it could be done without exciting suspicion in the minds of the ladies, Grant contrived upon one pretext or another to draw away all the male members of the party, to whom forthwith he disclosed the alarming intelligence which Captain Blake had brought to the island with him ; pointing out to them the new danger which thus threatened the very existence of them all, and earnestly begging them to give the matter their most serious consideration.

Suggestions were, of course, at once offered in plenty, but they all possessed one very serious drawback : they lacked practicability.

The least unpromising of them all was that of Captain Blake, who boldly advocated the abandonment of the scheme for building a vessel, and

proposed that, instead of incurring the delay and risk involved in the carrying out of such a plan, the raft should first be strengthened as much as possible, and that he, Manners, and Nicholls should then sail in her to Singapore, from whence it would be easy to dispatch a rescue vessel to the island to take off the rest of the party.

But when this proposal came to be canvassed more in detail, it was found that there were several very grave objections to it, the most grave of them all lying in the fact that, according to their calculations, the stormy season must now be close at hand; and, strengthen the raft as much as they would, or could, Grant believed that if she happened to be caught in a hurricane, nothing could prevent her going to pieces.

Moreover, Singapore was well to windward of the island they were then upon, and, though the raft did very fairly upon a taut bowline in fine weather and in a moderate sea, Grant expressed very grave doubts as to how she would behave in a strong breeze and a heavy sea.

Then, again, the absence of the skipper, Manners, and Nicholls would reduce the defensive strength of those left behind to two men only, and that, too, without any artificial protection, save such as their united strength might enable them to throw up.

On the whole, after canvassing the question thoroughly, it was decided that the skipper's plan was very much too risky for adoption under the then existing circumstances of the party, and they eventually came to the conclusion that no better course seemed open to them than to carry out Grant's original idea—namely, the construction of a house which should be strong enough to serve also as a fort in case of need.

The next point to be decided was, of what material should the house be constructed? Of timber of a suitable character there was a superabundance upon the island; nay, even on the islet itself there was more than sufficient for their purpose. But it would have to be cut, sawn to the required dimensions, and hauled to the site of the building before it could be made use of; and all this involved a great deal of labor, to say nothing of the fact that, when finished, the structure could easily be destroyed by fire.

Grant was strongly of opinion that stone was the most suitable material for the purpose; but, unfortunately, he was by no means certain that a quarry could be found in a convenient position and at a convenient distance for transportation. If it could, he believed that shells in sufficient quantities for the manufacture of lime could easily be collected on the beach; and he had no doubt as to his ability to construct a kiln in which to burn them.

As the engineer warmed with his subject he made the superiority of stone over wood so evident that it was finally decided he and Henderson should devote the next day to a search for a suitable quarry, whilst the skipper, with Manners and Nicholls for his assistants, was to essay the task of knocking up a temporary but somewhat more efficient shelter for the party than the tents would afford, pending the completion of the house or "fort," as they seemed inclined to style the proposed structure.

In accordance with this arrangement, immediately after breakfast next morning the tents were struck and placed on board the raft, and the ladies

and children also embarked in her to proceed round to Grant Island in charge of Captain Blake and his two assistants ; whilst the engineer and Henderson, armed with their repeating rifles and an axe each in their belts, set out in company for the gap in the cliffs, their intention being to proceed overland, and to separate at the head of the river, each taking one of its banks with the object of ascertaining whether any suitable quarry site could be found in a situation convenient for the shipment of stone on board the raft.

The quest occupied the two friends for the greater part of the day, they arriving abreast the islet within half an hour of each other, and reaching its friendly shores just in time to assist the working party there in putting the finishing touches to quite a respectable structure—half tent, half bower—for which the skipper had acted the part of architect.

The house, or shelter rather, for it was too rough and ready an affair to be worthy of the former appellation, was really a very creditable production—roomy and watertight, though it was doubtful whether it would prove capable of withstanding the buffeting of a hurricane—and Captain Blake was very justly proud of it.

On comparing notes it was found that both the explorers had been successful in their search. Both had found stone of a more or less suitable quality, some of it, indeed, being excellent ; but the honors of the day fell to the doctor's lot, he having not only discovered a quarry site in a most convenient situation, with stone of a quality far superior to anything that Grant had met with, but also an outcrop of coal.

This discovery was of infinitely greater value to the party, situated as they then were, than would have been the finding of a gold mine, and Grant in particular—who perhaps realized more fully than any of the others the exceeding importance of the discovery—was greatly elated thereat.

Fully alive to the importance of developing these new resources without delay, the five men started in the raft at daybreak next morning, well provided with picks, shovels, crowbars, sledges, and such other implements as it was thought might be useful, together with a keg of powder from the magazine of the Mermaid, and made their way up stream, Henderson acting as pilot.

The quarry was first reached, being situated only about half a mile above Grant Island, and a single glance sufficed to satisfy the refugees that here was stone not only of superior quality, but amply sufficient in quantity for every possible want of the party. The quarry face consisted of an almost perpendicular cliff of gray limestone springing out of the soil at a distance of only some fifty feet from the margin of the stream ; it was about thirty feet in height, and fully one hundred and fifty feet long.

Captain Blake and Nicholls landed here, provided with the powder and such tools as they needed, and instructed by the engineer—who promised to rejoin them as soon as he had inspected the coal output—began at once to lay bare the stone at the top of the cliff.

The rest of the party then proceeded in the raft to the "coal mine," as they already began to term it, which they found about a quarter of a mile further on. The outcrop proved, as Henderson had asserted, to be genuine

coal, and of very fair quality, too, with a prospect of it improving as it was worked down into; and, most important and fortunate for the discoverers, it, like the stone, was situated close to the river bank, near enough in fact to permit of its being loaded direct on the deck of the raft by means of a long wooden chute.

The doctor and young Manners willingly undertook to get such coal as might be required—not a very large quantity in all probability—and, stripping to the waist, at once set to work, whilst Grant made his way to the quarry on the raft.

On rejoining the skipper and Nicholls, the engineer found that the two men had worked to such excellent purpose that they had already laid bare an area of some forty feet of stone, and disclosed a small fissure which Grant thought would serve admirably to receive a blasting charge, which he at once proceeded to prepare.

This operation was soon accomplished, the fuse—a chemical preparation “made up” by Henderson the night before—was lighted, and the trio hastily retreated to a place of safety.

A minute later a faint *boom* was heard, followed by a tremendous crash and the rattle of falling fragments; and, hurrying back to the spot, the workers found that, by a lucky accident, the charge had been so placed as to dislodge and hurl down on to the bank beneath upwards of twenty tons of stone.

After this there was no further difficulty, for the layers happened to so run that a very little labor with the bars sufficed to send the stone down on to the bank ready for loading; and when any especial difficulty was experienced, a small quantity of powder always proved sufficient to overcome it. Such capital progress, indeed, did they make, that in less than a month they had not only quarried, but had actually transferred to the islet as much stone as it was thought they would require.

By that time a very fair quantity of coal was also ready for removal; and when this important task was accomplished, a kiln was built, and Grant himself undertook the manufacture of lime. Henderson and the skipper proceeded to erect a shed for its storage, Nicholls meanwhile essaying the task of putting up a smithy on the site of the future ship yard.

But before they were ready to begin their building operations in earnest, the long expected change in the weather—or rather the change of the seasons—had come upon them, and their work was somewhat retarded by the setting in of heavy rains, accompanied by terrific thunderstorms and occasional heavy gales of wind.

CHAPTER XXIII.—THE SKIPPER GOES A FISHING.

THE violent atmospheric disturbances which accompanied the change of the seasons lasted about a month, after which the weather became tolerably settled once more, though rain now fell, more or less heavily, every day.

To work out of doors in the midst of pelting rain was by no means pleasant, although there was no perceptible variation in the usual tempera-

ture of the climate. Still there existed in the breasts of all so strong a feeling of insecurity so long as the "fort" remained unbuilt, that they determined rather to suffer the unpleasantness of being daily drenched to the skin than to protract the uneasy feeling of defenselessness which haunted them.

The building, then, was pushed forward with all possible expedition, and, thanks to the indefatigable energy with which they labored, was so far finished as to be habitable within a couple of months of its commencement, though of course a great deal still remained to be done before it could be regarded as absolutely secure.

The site for this house or fort—for when finished it really was strong enough to merit the latter name—was finally fixed so as to include within its limits a spring of pure fresh water—an adjunct of the utmost importance if it should ever fall to the lot of the occupants to be placed in a state of siege, and it possessed the further advantage of completely commanding both the land and water approaches to the proposed ship yard.

It was built in the form of a hollow square, inclosing a small courtyard (which the ladies determined to convert into a garden at the earliest opportunity) with the spring in its center. One side of the house was set apart for the purpose of a general living room; the two contiguous sides were divided unequally—the larger divisions forming respectively the doctor's and the engineer's sleeping rooms, while the smaller divisions served as kitchen and larder; and the fourth side afforded ample sleeping accommodation for the remainder of the party, with a store room in one angle of the building, and the magazine and armory in the other.

The windows all looked outward, but were small, and strongly defended with stout iron bars built into the masonry, and with massive wood shutters inside, loopholed for rifle firing. The doors giving access to the rooms all opened upon the courtyard, and were as high and wide as they could be made, so as to let in plenty of light and air.

For still further security there was no doorway whatever in the exterior face of the building, egress and ingress being possible only by means of a staircase in the courtyard leading up on to the flat roof, and thence down on the outside by means of a light bamboo ladder which could be hauled up on the roof in case of need.

The roof, or roofs rather, had only a very gentle slope or fall inward, just sufficient to allow of the rain flowing off, and afforded a fighting platform at a height of about fourteen feet from the ground, the defenders being sheltered by the exterior walls, which were carried up five feet and also loopholed.

It seemed at first sight a great waste of labor to build so strong a place as this for what the refugees hoped would be a comparatively brief sojourn, but, as Grant pointed out to them, there was no knowing precisely how long their stay on the island might be protracted, and if they were going to construct a defense at all, it was as well, whilst they were about it, to build something which should effectually serve its purpose.

And after all, when the work came to be undertaken, it was found that it took but little if any longer time than would have been required to put up a wooden house and to surround it with an effective palisade.

Another month saw the fort so far completed that Grant thought he might now safely take in hand the saw mill upon which he had set his mind, and he and the skipper accordingly devoted themselves henceforward to that undertaking, finishing it within a few days of the date when Henderson reported that all was done at the fort which at that time was deemed necessary.

The doctor and his party now took to the woods, armed with their axes, and began the important task of selecting and felling the timber for the proposed boat, the design for which Grant had been diligently working upon whenever he could find a spare hour or two to devote to the purpose.

As ultimately worked out this design was for a cutter, to be of twelve feet beam, forty feet long on the load water line, and of such a depth as would not only afford comfortable head room in the cabins, but also give the craft a good hold of the water and make her very staunch and seaworthy.

These dimensions, it was considered, were sufficient for perfect seaworthiness, whilst the various timbers would be light enough to permit of their being handled and placed in position with comparative ease with the limited power at their command. The greatest care was exercised in the selection of the timber, it being necessary to choose not only that which was thoroughly sound, but also such as could without very much labor be conveyed to the saw mill.

This latter necessity, or rather the actual labor of conveying the timber to the mill, caused their progress to be somewhat less rapid than they had anticipated, especially as Nicholls was now busily engaged at the smithy preparing the bolts, fastenings, and other ironwork for the little craft, but, notwithstanding all, the work advanced with fairly satisfactory rapidity.

It had been decided that the whole of the timber should be cut, sawn and stacked in the ship yard before even the keel blocks were laid down, so that it might become at least partially seasoned before being worked into the hull, and this was accomplished in rather less than a couple of months.

At length the day arrived when, everything being ready, the keel of the vessel was to be laid down—a task which, the keel piece being cut out of one log, it took the little band an entire day to accomplish satisfactorily. And it was on the evening of this particular day, or rather during the ensuing night, that the little colony sustained a loss which plunged its members into grief so deep that its shadow never entirely left them until long after the termination of their sojourn upon the island.

It happened thus: During the numerous passages of the raft to and fro between the west bay and Grant Island, a small reef had been discovered some six miles north of the main island, upon which reef, it had been further discovered, a certain fish of peculiarly delicate and agreeable flavor was to be caught between the hours of sunset and sunrise. So very delicious had this particular species of fish been found that it had become quite a custom for one or more of the men to take the raft after the day's work was over and go off to the reef for an hour or two's fishing, thus combining business and pleasure in a most agreeable manner.

Captain Blake, especially, always partook of the fish with exceptional relish; and, it happening at this time that all hands had been too busily

occupied for any of them to go out for several days past, the skipper thought he would celebrate so momentous an occasion as the laying of the keel by a few hours' fishing upon the reef.

Accordingly, as the evening meal was approaching completion, he announced his intention, at the same time inquiring if any of the others felt disposed to join him. All, however, confessed themselves to be too tired to find pleasure in anything short of a good night's rest, and the skipper therefore departed alone, Henderson calling out after him as he went :

"Don't go to sleep and fall overboard, captain ; and keep a sharp eye upon the weather. To my mind the wind seems inclined to drop, and if it does it will probably shift. And I suppose you have noticed that heavy cloud bank working up there to the westward ?"

"Ay, ay, I've noticed it," answered the skipper good humoredly, but slightly derisive at what he considered the presumption of a landsman in thinking it necessary to caution *him* about the weather. "Another thunderstorm, I take it—they always work up against the wind ; but I shall be back again and safe in my bunk before it breaks. Good night !"

CHAPTER XXIV.—THE CAPTAIN'S DREAM

CAPTAIN BLAKE strolled down to the tiny cove in which the punt was moored, cast off the painter, and paddled out to the raft, which rode at a buoy anchored about fifty yards distant from the beach.

Arriving alongside the raft he made fast the punt's painter to the buoy, loosed the craft's triangular sail, mastheaded the yard by means of a small winch Nicholls had fitted for the purpose, cast off his moorings, and began to work down the stream seaward, the wind being against him.

He was not long in reaching the open water, and as he shot out between the two headlands which guarded the mouth of the harbor he noticed with satisfaction that the cloud bank to which Henderson had warningly directed attention had already completely risen above the horizon, and was slowly melting away.

True, the atmosphere was somewhat hazy, and the breeze was less steady than usual ; but the general aspect of the sky was promising enough, and if a change of weather was impending it would not, the skipper told himself, occur for several hours yet, or without giving him sufficient warning to enable him to regain the island in good time.

Arrived on the reef—over which, by the way, there was plenty of water, four fathoms being the least the party had ever found upon it—the expectant sportsman anchored, lowered the sail, and threw his lines overboard.

The sport, however, was not by any means good that night, for it was fully half an hour before he got a bite ; and the interval which followed his first capture was so long that the skipper's interest waned and his thoughts wandered off—as indeed they very often did—to his ship. He fell to wondering what had become of her, whether the mutineers had actually gone to the extreme length of carrying into effect their piratical plans, whether Sibyl and Ned were still on board, and, if so, how matters fared with them.

He was full of commiseration for the two young people, both having taken a strong hold upon his warm and kindly heart, and he scarcely knew which to pity more—whether Sibyl, cruelly and perhaps permanently cut off from all intercourse with her own sex and constantly in association with a band of lawless men; or Ned, likewise a prisoner, with all his life's prospects blighted, and in addition to this the never ceasing care, anxiety and watchfulness which he must endure on Sibyl's account.

Most people would have been disposed to say unhesitatingly that the girl's lot was infinitely the worse of the two. But the skipper did not; he understood pretty well, or thought he did, the position of affairs on board the Flying Cloud; and he knew to absolute certainty that so long as Ned had life and strength to protect her, Sibyl was reasonably secure.

But Ned, he repeated to himself, would always have her safety and well being upon his mind in addition to his other cares and anxieties. It was a miserable plight for both of them, he mused, and he didn't see how they were to get out of it—unless, indeed, they could manage to steal away in a boat and give them the slip some fine dark night.

And what would become of them then? the captain asked himself. What chance of ultimate escape would they have? He knew Ned well enough to feel assured he would never attempt so extreme a step without first making the fullest provision for the safety of his companion and himself; but when all was done, what prospect would they have of being picked up in those seas?

He pictured them to himself drifting helplessly hither and thither, exposed to the scorching rays of the sun all day and the pelting rain at night; their provisions consumed, their water breaker empty, and hope slowly giving way to despair as day and night succeeded each other, with no friendly sail to cheer their failing sight and drive away the horrible visions which haunt those who are perishing of hunger and thirst.

He saw Ned's stalwart form grow gaunt and lean, and Sibyl's rounded outlines sharpen and waste away under the fierce fires of hunger; and his soul sickened within him as their moans of anguish smote upon his ear. And at last he heard Sibyl, in her agony and despair, entreat Ned to take away the life which had become a burden to her. And he saw and heard, too, how Ned, his speech thick and inarticulate with torturing thirst, first tried unavailingly to soothe and comfort and encourage the suffering girl; and how at last, in sheer pity for her and her mad desperation at their hopeless state, the lad drew forth his knife and stealthily tested the keenness of its edge and point.

And as he watched, with feverish interest, yet unspeakable anxiety and horror, he saw that the long protracted suffering had at last proved too much for the poor lad and that his brain was giving way; for look! the baleful light of madness gleams in his bloodshot eyes! Madness gives new strength to his nerveless limbs as he rises and bends over his companion. The blade quivers and flashes in the sunlight, and Captain Blake, with a cry of horror, starts forward—to awake at the sound of his own voice and to find himself at the edge of the raft, in the very act of leaping into the jaws of a shark which is eyeing him hungrily from the water alongside!

He luckily checks his spring in time. To seize the boat hook and strike savagely at the waiting shark with its point follows as a matter of course ; and then the skipper returns thanks not only for his escape, but also that the events he had just been witnessing are nothing more than an ugly dream.

Blake's next act is to haul in the lines which have dropped from his nerveless hands during sleep, and which would unquestionably have been lost had he not taken the precaution to make them fast ; and he finds to his chagrin that not only the bait but also the hooks have been carried off.

He therefore neatly coils up his fishing tackle preparatory to shaping a course for home ; for the moon is on the verge of the western horizon, and he knows therefore that it is past midnight.

Moreover, though the breeze is rather fresher than it was and the horizon is clear, there is a murkiness in the atmosphere overhead which portends a change of weather ; and as he looks knowingly about him he gives audible expression to his opinion that there will be but little work done in the ship yard on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXV.—A STRANGE SAIL.

THE grapnel is lifted, and the skipper, attaching the handle to the winch, begins to masthead the yard of the solitary sail which propels the raft. As he does so his eyes are directed towards the moon, now slowly sinking beneath the horizon.

Ha ! what is that ?

The labor at the winch is suspended, a hasty turn is taken with the halyard, and Captain Blake strains forward, his eyes shaded by both hands, the better to observe that black spot which is slowly gliding athwart the moon's pale face.

Little need is there, though, for him to look so intently to ascertain what that black spot really is ; it is more for the purpose of assuring himself that his eyes are not playing him false, or that he is not once more the victim of a dream. No ; this is not a dream. He is wide awake enough now, and his mind is busy with a thousand tumultuous thoughts, for as he watches, clear and unmistakable glide the upper sails of a large ship across the face of the sinking planet.

She is steering south, but whether easterly or westerly it is impossible to say as she stands out silhouette-like against her golden background ; but one thing is plain—she is moving very slowly.

The skipper darts to the compass—one of a pair saved from the wreck of the *Mermaid*—and striking a match, which he carefully shelters from the wind in the crown of his cap, he manages to take her bearing before she vanishes from his sight.

He next completes the setting of his sail, hauls aft the sheet, and, jamming the raft close upon the wind, asks himself what is the best thing to do.

To return to the island will consume an hour of most precious time ; and when there what could he do to attract the stranger's attention ? Nothing more than light a huge bonfire ; and the only spot suitable for this is the

western side of the mountain, to reach which will consume at least another half hour. Then there would be wood to collect, occupying say another half hour, making a total of at least two hours and a half before such a signal could be rendered visible.

And perhaps, after all, those on board the ship might not see it, or, seeing it, might not understand its meaning—might suppose it to be nothing more than a fire built by the natives, and so pass on their way.

No ; that would not do—the risk of failure would be too great.

What then ? There remained nothing, in Captain Blake's opinion, but to pursue the stranger.

She could not, he thought, be going more than five knots, judging by the strength of the breeze and the momentary glimpse of her ; whilst the raft, light as she was and with the wind well over her quarter, would go nearly or quite seven.

The strange sail was about twelve miles off ; therefore, if he could over-haul her at the rate of about two knots an hour, he ought to be near enough to attract her attention by sunrise.

But he must bear up in chase at once, there was no time to waste in running ashore to make known his intentions ; and as for help, he wanted none, he was quite able to manage the raft single handed. Moreover, he began to suspect that Henderson would prove to be right in that suggestion of his respecting a change of weather, which made it all the more important that the strange sail should be overhauled before the change should occur.

These reflections passed through the skipper's brain in a single moment—not perhaps quite so definitely as here set forth, but to the same purpose—and in the next he jammed his helm hard up, eased off the sheet, and bore away upon a course which he conjectured would enable him to intercept the stranger.

For a few minutes after the disappearance of the moon Blake was able, or fancied he was able, still to distinguish the canvas of the chase looming up vaguely like a dark, shapeless shadow upon the horizon ; but either the sky grew darker in that quarter or the weather thickened, for he was soon obliged to admit that he could see it no longer.

But that circumstance gave him not the least concern ; he had set his course by a star, and he knew that so long as he continued to steer for it, so long would the course of the raft converge toward that of the stranger.

He *was* concerned, however, to notice later on that not only was the weather thickening overhead, necessitating a frequent changing of the star by which he was following his course, but also that the wind was becoming unsteady. Sometimes it fell away to such an extent as to cause the raft's sail to flap heavily as she rolled over the ridges of the swell, and anon breezed up quite fresh again, but with a change of perhaps a couple of points in its direction, the change generally being of such a character as to bring the wind forward more on his starboard beam.

Gradually the haze so thickened overhead that such stars as were not already obscured grew dim and soon disappeared altogether, leaving the solitary man dependent only upon the somewhat fickle wind for a guide by which

to steer his course ; for, though he had a compass on board the raft, he had no binnacle and no lamps by which to illuminate the compass card.

It is true the island was still in sight, some four miles astern, but the night had grown so dark and the atmosphere so thick, that the land merely loomed like a vast undefined blot of darkness against the black horizon, being so indistinct, indeed, that only the practiced eye of a seaman could have detected its presence at all ; it was therefore almost useless as an object to steer by.

It had by this time begun to dawn upon the skipper that his adventure was likely to prove of a far more serious character than he had at all contemplated ; and he was earnestly debating with himself the question whether his wisest course would not, after all, be to abandon the chase and make the best of his way back to the island, when the breeze once more freshened up so strongly, and that, too, dead aft, that it made everything on board the raft surge again as she gathered way and skimmed off before it.

Blake, calculating that even if the chase were sailing away from instead of toward him, it would shorten his distance from her at least a couple of miles before she caught it, grimly held on his course, determined to risk everything rather than lose so good a chance ; his chief fear now being that the sheet would part under the tremendous strain brought to bear upon it by the immense sail.

The raft, as has been elsewhere stated, was of very peculiar construction, her shape and build being such as to peculiarly favor speed, especially when running dead before the wind. Light as she now was, she skimmed away before the fierce squall at a rate which made Blake's heart bound with exultation as he looked first to one side and then the other and noted the furious speed with which the phosphorescent foam from under her bows was left behind.

There was now no longer any thought of turning back, for Captain Blake had by this time arrived at a firm conviction, first, that it was by the special intervention of Providence that he had been led to undertake his fishing excursion that night, and next, that the freshening up of a dead fair wind just when it did was a second special intervention of Providence to prevent his giving up the chase.

And so he held on everything, and the raft rushed away dead before the wind through the pitchy darkness, the mast creaking ominously in its step every now and then, and the tautly strained gear aloft surging from time to time in an equally ominous manner.

The sea rose rapidly—showing that the solitary voyager was fast drawing out from under the sheltering lee of the island astern—and the foaming wave crests, vividly phosphorescent, momentarily towered higher and more threateningly, and hissed louder and more angrily in the luminous wake of the flying craft.

CHAPTER XXVI.—THE STORM BREAKS.

THE squall lasted a full hour, when the wind died away even more suddenly than it had arisen, and the raft was left tumbling about with little more than steerage way upon her.

The skipper had no means of ascertaining the time, it being too intensely dark to permit of his reading the face of his watch even when it was held close to his eyes, though he made two or three unsuccessful attempts to do so. Anxious and impatient as he was for the dawn, he knew that it must be at least another hour, perhaps nearer two, before he could reasonably expect its appearance.

Two hours more of sickening suspense! One hundred and twenty minutes! With the weather in such a threatening state what might not happen in the interval?

If he could only have obtained an occasional glimpse of the compass, or if the night had been less opaquely dark he would not have cared so much. In the one case he would have been enabled not only to keep a mental reckoning of his own course, but also that of the ship ahead, and to follow her direction, no matter how capricious the breeze; whilst in the other case he might have stood some chance of catching a momentary glimpse of her.

As his reflection took this turn the captain stooped and looked ahead under the foot of the sail, looked more intently, rubbed his eyes and looked again.

What was it he saw? A light—lights? Yes, surely; it must be so, or were those faint, luminous specks merely illusory and a result of the overstraining of his visual organs due to the intensity of his gaze into the gloom?

No; those feebly glimmering points of light were stationary; they maintained the same fixed distance from each other, and he could count them—one, two, three—half a dozen of them at least, if not more; he could not be certain, for they were so very faint.

What could it mean? Was there a whole fleet of ships down there to leeward?

That there was *something* was an absolute certainty; and as it seemed an impossibility that it could be anything else it was only reasonable to conclude that it must be a ship or ships.

At all events, there could be no question as to the course he ought to follow; it would be worse than folly to continue in pursuit of an invisible ship, with those lights in comparatively plain view only a couple of points on his lee bow.

So the skipper bore away until the faint luminous spots opened out just clear of the heel of the long yard. There he resolutely kept them, the wind having by this time fallen so light that it was necessary for him to make frequent sweeps with the steering oar in order to keep the raft's head pointed in the required direction.

Suddenly a greenish spectral radiance beamed down upon him from above; and, quickly casting a startled glance aloft, Blake shudderingly beheld a ball of lambent greenish light quivering upon the upper extremity of the long, tapering yard and swaying to and fro with the roll of the raft, much as the flame of a candle would have done under similar circumstances.

Clinging lightly to the end of the yard, it alternately elongated and flattened as the spar swayed to and fro, now and then rolling a few inches down the yard as though about to travel down to the deck, but as often returning to the extremity of the yard again.

Presently another and similar luminous ball gleamed into shape at the mast head, swaying and wavering about the end of the spar like its companion.

They were those strange electric fireballs known as *corporsants*! While they conveyed to the skipper the only additional warning needed of the impending elemental strife, they also at once explained the mystery of the lights to leeward for which he was steering. Those also were undoubtedly corporsants glimmering from the spars of the strange sail of which he was in pursuit, and which, from her present proximity, must have been steering to the eastward, and consequently toward him, instead of to the westward and away from him, as he had feared.

Blake believed she certainly could not be more than a mile distant, his conviction being that the feeble, sickly lights of the ghostly corporsants could not penetrate further than that distance in so thick an atmosphere. It now became of the utmost importance—nay, it might even be a matter of life or death for him—to reach the stranger before the hurricane should burst upon them.

He looked over the side to ascertain the speed of the raft through the water, and his heart quailed as he observed that, save for an occasional tiny phosphorescent spark on the surface or a faintly luminous halo lower down in the black depths slowly drifting by, there was nothing to indicate that she had any motion whatever.

Her speed was not more than half a knot per hour; and the stranger was probably a mile distant—two hours away at the raft's then rate of progress!

Something must be done, and quickly, too; for out of the darkness round about him there now floated weird, whispering sighs, faint dismal moanings, and now and then a sudden momentary rush as of invisible wings, telling that the storm fiend was marshaling his forces and about to make his swoop.

What was to be done? There were only two oars on board the raft—the steering oars—and it would be next to impossible to use them as means of propulsion. Moreover, if a little puff of wind should come, as is sometimes the case, before the great burst of the hurricane, they would, one or both, be wanted where they were.

Perhaps hailing might be of use. At all events, Blake would try. And, placing his hollowed hands on each side of his mouth to form a speaking trumpet, the skipper drew a deep inspiration or two, hailed with the utmost strength of his lungs:

"Ship ahoy—y!"

And then listened.

No response. Nothing save the faint murmurings and railings of the gathering gale.

"Ship ahoy—y!"

Hark! what was that? Did he, indeed, hear a faint answering halloo from away yonder in the direction of those weird lights, or was it merely that the wish was father to the thought?

"S—H—I—P A—HOY—Y—Y!"

"Holloo!"

Quite unmistakable this time ; and the skipper, in a perfect frenzy of excitement, repeats his hail time after time, waiting only long enough to receive the answer before hailing again.

Presently a bright star suddenly appears under the faintly gleaming corpsants. It is a ship's lantern held up over the rail.

A minute later a tiny spark appears close to the lantern, immediately bursting into a keen bluish glare from which a cloud of white smoke arises and flakes of bluewhite flame drop now and then, as a portfire is burnt.

By its brilliant though ghostly radiance the skipper can see, less than half a mile distant, a brig under nothing but close reefed main topsail and fore-topmast staysail—evidently fully prepared for the worst that can come to her in the shape of weather—with a little group of figures gathered about the portfire, and a small group, consisting of two men only, abaft the main rigging, all peering eagerly in his direction.

He sees one of the figures raise its arms, and presently there comes floating across the inky water :

"Halloo, there ! Who hails ?"

The skipper again raises his hands to his mouth, draws a mighty inspiration, and replies, as the readiest means of bringing succor :

"Shipwrecked m-a-n. Broad—on—your—port—b-e-a-m !"

The man who had hailed waves his hand to show that he has heard ; and then the portfire burns out.

At this moment the whole firmament from zenith to horizon is rent asunder, and for a single instant the entire universe seems to have been set on fire by the fierce blaze of the lightning which flashes from the rent, while the accompanying thunder crash is so deafening that even the skipper, seasoned as he is, quails beneath the shock of it.

For a single instant the sea and everything upon it, from horizon to horizon, is illumined by a light brighter than that of day ; and in that single instant Blake sees not only the brig, enveloped in a perfect network of fire, but also the huge piles of cloud overhead, twisted and distorted into a hundred fantastic shapes by the forces at work within them.

The next moment down comes the rain, not in drops, not even in sheets of water, but in a perfectly overwhelming deluge of such density and volume that Blake, bowing to his knees beneath it gasps and chokes like a drowning man.

But he speedily recovers his senses—he had need to, for he will soon want them all—and, staggering to his feet, makes toward the mast, which with the yard and dripping sail is now distinctly outlined against the milky background of sea, milky by reason of the phosphorescence of its surface being lashed into luminosity by the pouring rain.

He grasps the halyard of the sail, and with feverish haste proceeds to cast it adrift from its belaying pin, murmuring the while :

"Now God be merciful to me, a sinner ; for I am too late. The time for rescue is past !"

Harry Collingwood.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE GENERAL'S EMISSARY.

Being the true copy of an incident recorded in the diary of Captain Walker Heywood—A Revolutionary episode in which Cupid's arrows played their part.

ALTHOUGH I am aware that the occurrences which I am about to record carried no great influence for either good or evil in the cause of American independence, and are of no special interest to the public at large, yet I am convinced that my descendants, at least, will enjoy reading from these pages and will rejoice to know that in so great a national crisis as our Revolution, their grandfather did his duty as best he could.

On the 30th of October, 1776, the battle of White Plains was fought, but resulted in victory for neither army, and General Washington, finding that the position of the Americans was becoming insecure, issued orders for the army to prepare to fall back to the heights of North Castle, but at the same time to present a show of defense to the enemy.

I had come from my home in Maryland some months previous, on a visit to some relatives in New York, and was present during all those stirring events which led to the occupation of the city by the British. I made haste to ally myself with Colonel Smallwood's Maryland Regiment and was consequently with the army at White Plains.

On the afternoon of Thursday, the day after the battle, while I was sitting in my tent, crouching under my wraps in the chilly air, I was awakened from my reverie by the vision of a figure darkening the entrance. I looked up and beheld an officer in a rather seedy uniform.

"Captain Heywood, I believe?" said he.

"At your service," I replied.

"I have a letter for you from the general," he said, handing me a note which was folded with the utmost precision and addressed in a clear, bold hand.

"I believe it does not require me to take back your reply," he continued with a bow.

"Whom have I the honor of addressing?" I inquired.

"Captain Ephraim Wilson, of the Westchester militia," he answered, and with a parting salute he was gone.

Hastily tearing open the missive, I found that it was from General Washington and requested an immediate audience with me at headquarters. So I brushed down my well worn suit, not having been able to procure a uniform, and made my way to the old Miller mansion. In the hallway I met Colonel Robert H. Harrison, the general's secretary, and as we saluted, he said:

"The general is in that corner room, walk in; he is expecting you."

I entered. The commander in chief was standing with his hands behind

him, gazing out of the window. At my entrance he looked around. How can I describe his face? So serene, so kind hearted, so earnest and honest and true! With him a friend was always a friend, but an enemy, while he must be conquered, was to be granted the certain rights and fair play to which he was entitled. I am always thankful for the recollection of that face.

He met me half way and offered his hand with a warm, hearty grasp.

"Heywood, I am glad to see you," he said, "but what has detained you so long?"

I informed him that I had received his note but a few moments before.

I can see him now, in my mind's eye, as he stood before me, tall and stately, enveloped in thought. If ever mortal was endowed with kingly gifts, that man was George Washington.

"I shall have to speak to Colonel Harrison about this," he said at length. "He sent you the note almost an hour ago."

We conversed for a few moments on matters regarding our respective families, for I had known the general some years.

Then he went over to the hearth and stood poking the blazing logs with a stick.

"Heywood," said he, "I wonder if I can ask you to do me a favor?"

"I am entirely at your service, sir," I replied.

"And to serve your country at the same time?" he continued with a gentle inflection of the voice.

"I would all the more gladly assist you," I answered.

"Good," said he. "The country is in a serious plight. The crisis is at hand, and she needs all the assistance we can render. If we cannot manage to hold our own at North Castle, the end is near. It is quite important that I should forward a letter at once to Major Ellery at the mouth of Croton River. I presume that I can trust you with its safe transmission to Major Ellery?" The anxious look that I had noticed on my entrance overspread his features.

"General Washington, I am a Southerner," I replied with emphasis.

"True," he retorted, "but I have known some Southerners who are not wholly trustworthy."

"I am a man of honor, sir," I rejoined with some heat, considerably nettled that he should for a moment question my integrity. He must have noticed this.

"Forgive me, captain," he said. "But I have so much to contend with. Desertions are frequent, and there seems to be such a lack of interest in our common cause, that at times I sometimes get a little out of patience."

"But to come to the point," he continued, his face brightening, "some of the people of Dutchess County have offered us a supply of ammunition and provisions of which we are seriously in need. Major Ellery has been ordered to convey them hither by way of Tarrytown. I am informed that General Howe is preparing another attack, and have issued instructions that the army make ready to fall back among the hills of North Castle. The enemy will, of course, follow and take possession of our present camp. You

undoubtedly see the necessity of my getting word to Major Ellery to proceed to North Castle. Furthermore, I am told that the war vessels which have been sent up the North River by the enemy are now anchored at Tarrytown. In this case it would be judicious for Major Ellery to leave the post road bordering the river, at Sparta, and take the one leading southeast. You comprehend the situation, do you not? Of course, there is considerable personal risk to be incurred. You are willing to go?"

I bowed in assent.

"I am deeply gratified, Captain Heywood." He shook my hand with a hearty grasp. "Good by," he added, as he handed me the note. "May the good God guard you."

When I opened the door, I remember he called out to me: "Do not lose that letter or you may lose your head." I believe this was the nearest the general ever came to a joke. Life with him was filled with too many serious problems for levity.

I hurried back to my tent and equipped myself for my journey. I secured the letter in the inside pocket of my great coat, and was soon in the saddle, riding at a brisk canter towards Tarrytown.

I made my way through this village without molestation and had ridden not more than half a mile when I discovered that I was being followed. I heard the clatter of hoofs in the distance, and instinctively halted to listen. There was a curve in the road at that place where it followed the course of a stream through a dense growth of trees. I could tell, by the rhythmic fall of the hoofs, that it was a single horseman, and I pulled out my pistol and waited; for a true Marylander will never flee from danger. If he proved to be an enemy, I was prepared for him.

The man came galloping around the turn in the road, and to my surprise I was confronted by Captain Wilson.

"Oh!" said he, with a wave of his hand, "I am indeed fortunate, Captain Heywood. I am on a little errand for his majesty—General Washington, of course you know I mean. We will call him 'his majesty' when the war is over. I had contemplated a lonesome ride. But I see you are going in my direction. I hope you will allow me the pleasure of your company."

We had started again at an even gallop.

Could it be possible, I thought, that General Washington had mistrusted me and had sent this man along either to watch me, or to take a duplicate note to Major Ellery?

Although my gentlemanly instincts forbade my inquiring into his business, I was secretly glad of his company, for his pleasant conversation helped to while away the time.

The clouds, which had been threatening rain all day now began to discharge their contents, and when we reached the little hamlet of Sparta, the very heavens seemed to be coming down in cold torrents.

A little way further on we arrived at a tavern, located at a fork in the road, where Wilson stopped and informed me that he was going to put up for a time, and after considerable demurring, I, too, dismounted. For, I told myself that Major Ellery would be obliged to pass this way, should he

attempt to brave such a storm, and to this I adduced the fact that I was chilled to the bone.

The door opened into a capacious hall, at the opposite end of which was an immense fireplace. An elderly, gentlemanly appearing man and a young woman were sitting near the hearth. The woman was evidently preparing something to eat. They both rose at our entrance and looked at us in a half frightened, half suspicious, questioning way.

We bowed, and on inquiry were informed that "old Brady," as the host was called, was somewhere about the premises, and that his wife was lying very ill in an adjoining room. The old gentleman said that he and his daughter had arrived some time ago and had found it necessary to stop on account of the storm, and were obliged to prepare their own refreshment. We were not of the Southern party—meaning the British? No. He thought not, glancing at Wilson's uniform. Well, he and his daughter were traveling from White Plains to Albany, and expected to take a boat from Peekskill the next day. His name was Reuben Everard, and this was his daughter Ruth. What were our names?

While this informal method of introduction had been progressing, I was busily eyeing the girl who was watching her father.

She appeared to be about nineteen or twenty years of age. Her rather slender form gave her the appearance of being taller than she really was. Her face was a trifle pale, probably from the fatigue of the journey. Her rich brown hair was arranged in a loose knot at the crown of the head and hung in flowing curls to her shoulders. Her eyes were of a sort that are rarely seen—a deep brown, out from which seemed to shine an inherent sweetness of soul. These, with a daintily curving mouth, formed what seemed to me one of the sweetest faces I had ever seen.

The old gentleman proved to be very genial and urged us to partake of the luncheon which his daughter had prepared. Miss Everard insisted on our taking off our coats and drying them by the fire.

It is not necessary to record any of the conversation and incidents which occurred during my call at the tavern, but it is sufficient to say that I passed an unusually pleasant hour, and Miss Everard's frank and genial manner almost wholly absorbed my attention. But I did not entirely forget myself, for I remember going to the door once or twice to view the state of the weather, and finally, when there came a lull in the violence of the storm, I leisurely prepared to continue my journey.

I was loth to leave, but I am a man of honor and knew my duty. I waved an adieu to the old gentleman and his daughter, but Miss Everard was fumbling nervously among her wraps and to my disappointment did not look up.

Wilson followed me to the door with many good wishes and gave me his hand. Not being thoroughly familiar with the ground I was traveling I inquired of him which road led to the mouth of the Croton. He thought for a moment and said, "Take the one to the right."

For all the rain had abated, there was a severe gale blowing from the northeast, and the road was in places sheathed several inches deep with mud.

I took the direction suggested by Captain Wilson, which led up a long hill, and on reaching the summit I was suddenly brought to a standstill by a couple of rough looking fellows armed with muskets.

"Halt!" they cried.

I reined up.

"Friend or foe?" one of them demanded.

"That depends on circumstances," I answered coolly.

"Come now, young fellow, no fooling there," said the other. "Speak up or I'll blow your brains out. Are you for the north or south?"

Noticing that one of the men wore a blue cockade on his hat, I answered confidently, "North, and a messenger from General Washington. Clear the road!"

"Not so fast, young man," said the one wearing the cockade, advancing a few steps and taking hold of my bridle. "What is your business?"

If the man had been alone I could have given him his deserts for his insolence, but the other one kept a close watch on me with his musket ready.

"I'm looking for Major Ellery," I replied.

"Major Ellery?"

"Yes, at the mouth of the Croton."

"Mouth of the Croton!" he exclaimed. "Why, you wouldn't reach the mouth of the Croton by this road in a year."

I looked at the fellow in surprise. "Which is the road, man?"

"The one to the left," he replied.

I tried to turn my horse in the direction of the tavern, but the man at the bridle still held me fast.

"Hold on there," he cried. "We can't let you go until you give us some proofs of citizenship. You said you were a messenger from Mr. Washington. Can't you show us some writings or something of the sort, just to make our conscience easy?"

It was evident that I was on the wrong track, thanks to Captain Wilson. I realized that I must get back to the main road soon, or I would be liable to miss Major Ellery.

"Yes," I said, "I have in my pocket a note for Major Charles Ellery, written in the general's own hand." I fished into my pocket where I had placed the letter, but to my utter astonishment, discovered that it was gone.

The fellow standing by noticed my dismay, but misinterpreted it.

"Lost it, I suppose," said he with a cynical laugh. "That's what they all say when they get caught. Bill, I guess this is the one we're after. Dis-mount, sir. We shall have to see Captain Hunter about this."

While the fellow was talking, it flashed through my mind how I had been duped. Delay would now be fatal to my mission. Even my honor might be questioned. I knew that it would be useless to argue with these two stubborn countrymen. There was but one thing to do, and although it was attended with great risk, I did it quickly. As the man turned to say something to his companion, I cracked him over the head with the butt of my pistol, which I had instinctively grasped when accosted. It was a good sound blow, and the man threw his hand to his head and reeled backward.

As I turned my horse I heard the click of the other's flintlock. But, thanks to a protecting Providence the rain had spoiled his priming.

As I rode down the hill, the full effect of my loss grew upon me. What would General Washington say, when he heard of it? And if the fact became generally known, I would be made a laughing stock in the army. I was convinced now that Captain Wilson had played me false and had probably stolen the letter from my coat at the tavern while my back was turned. Wilson was undoubtedly a British spy and the wretch had put me in a pretty box.

By the time I burst into the door of the tavern I was in a high state of excitement. Old Mr. Everard was seated calmly by the fire and looked round at my intrusion.

"Where is he?" I cried out.

"Who? Your friend, do you mean?"

"My friend!" I shouted. "My friend! He is a thief and a liar! Where is he?"

Mr. Everard looked confused. "I don't know," he replied, "I cannot tell. He left a moment ago. My daughter sewed his coat for him and——"

"Where is your daughter?" I interrupted.

"She was here a moment ago——"

I did not wait to hear the rest, but rushed out into the air. I saw a man walking near the horseshed and made for him, but found that he was the stable boy. I learned from him that the man who had accompanied me, had ridden towards the south just a few seconds previous, and that a few minutes before, the young lady, Miss Everard, had ordered her horse and had gone north with "old Brady," the host.

Here was a new phase of the case. Could it be possible that the young lady was the thief? No, I argued. What motive could she have for purloining my letter? How could she ever know that I had such a letter? Of course these thoughts passed through my mind in much less time than it takes to write them down, and in a moment I was on my horse and dashing down the post road in pursuit of Captain Wilson. As I said before, the mud was deep, and as the horse struck out heartily through it, it often splashed as high as my head and came down in a shower.

But I had no time to consider my own convenience. In fact, I was wholly absorbed with the one purpose of capturing the villain who had treated me so basely. Down a hill we went flying, and at a turn in the road I caught sight of a flying horseman ahead. Darkness was rapidly descending, but I could see that I was gaining, for each second the figure in advance assumed a more definite outline. As we rushed along I remembered the black shadow of a house at the right, but this was passed in an instant. I knew by his actions that the rider was conscious that he was being pursued, for I could see him kick his spurs into his horse's flanks to urge him on.

Suddenly the man switched round a corner, and into the lane which leads through Sparta to the river landing. I spurred on with renewed effort, fearing to miss my prey. But no, as I turned the corner, both horse and rider were floundering about at the summit of a slight incline. The animal was evidently in a fit, but the man was on his feet in an instant.

"Hold there!" I cried, as I reined up and recognized Captain Wilson.

"Ha! Is that you, Captain Heywood?" he yelled back. "Take that."

His pistol flashed and the ball grazed my left ear. But I think I could have made at him had it gone through my heart.

"You wretch!" I cried, snapping my pistol at him, but it would not go off. I was on foot in an instant (for a gentleman will never take an undue advantage of his adversary) and compelled him to defend himself with his sword. After a pass or two I found that he was no swordsman, and before he could fly I pierced him through the left shoulder. He uttered a piteous cry and fell backward.

"Where is my paper, you miserable thief?" I glared at him.

"Oh! help. I'm dying," he pleaded.

"Where is my paper?" I demanded.

"Oh! Oh! I'm going to die. Have mercy on me. Help me over to that house where I can be more comfortable and I will tell you."

My anger relaxed somewhat at the sight of this over polite young gentleman groveling in the soft mud, possibly in the pangs of death. I dragged him to the house referred to and from which a man had appeared as our brawl ended.

We soon had Wilson lying on the floor and set to work stanching the blood.

"Now, sir, my paper!" I demanded, my anger returning at the sight of him tolerably comfortable.

"I hate to give it up," he said with a sullen gleam. "I would have made a good thing out of the information. The captain of the *Phoenix*——"

"Come! Come!" I interrupted loudly. "I have no time to waste, you poor, despicable, spying hypocrite. Out with it!"

My tone was threatening, and he replied: "In my inside pocket. If I could use my arm I would get it."

I fumbled in his pocket, but found nothing except a blank letter sheet folded.

"You scoundrel!" I cried. "Will you lie to my face when I have it in my power to consign you to the place where you belong! You know that letter is not there."

"Not there!" he exclaimed, half rising. There was in his face, a look of genuine surprise. "Then I don't know where it is," and he sank back as if exhausted and closed his eyes.

I was truly in a quandary. I searched his pockets and his boots, but with no success. My head fairly reeled with the multitude of thoughts and suggestions that crowded my brain.

Could it be possible after all that I had been deceived by fair eyes and that Miss Everard was the true thief? In that case the man before me had suddenly become a lunatic. Or possibly he and Miss Everard were confederates. But could the possessor of such clear, brown eyes be guilty of such an act? The alternative now left me was to find either her or her father and learn what they knew.

I ordered the owner of the house to keep a close watch on Wilson until I

should return. Had he been equal to the task, I should have compelled him to ride back with me.

It was terribly dark and the dripping of wet from the somber trees by the roadside gave an unusually ghostly effect to the surroundings. I urged my horse into a gallop, and was soon at the inn again. But as I was dismounting I was surrounded by three men, who secured my arms before I could defend myself.

"What is the meaning of all this?" I demanded.

"You are just the chicken we are after," said one. "We're always on the lookout for just such as you. Southern spies are not going to thrive well in this soil."

"But I am of the northern party and am a messenger from the general to Major Ellery."

"Exactly," said the man, "but you'll wish you hadn't seen the major quite so soon."

They hustled me into the main hall of the inn, where I found, seated at a table, looking over a map, a large man, of middle age possessing a round, jovial face.

"Here's another one, major," announced one of my captors. We just caught him eavesdropping at the door."

"Are you Major Ellery?" I inquired.

"That is my name, sir," he replied.

"Well, Major Ellery," I went on, "I wish to protest against the very discourteous and uncivil manner in which I have been treated by these men. I have come by order of General Washington, to instruct you to proceed to North Castle instead of White Plains. The whole army will be at North Castle in a day or so. You are to leave the post road just below Sparta, in order to avoid any trouble from the enemy's ships at Tarrytown."

"Your name, sir," he asked.

"Captain Walker Heywood of the Maryland volunteers."

He motioned one of the men to him and whispered something to him, whereupon the fellow entered a room somewhere back of me, and the major continued his questioning.

"The general invariably consigns his orders to writing. You doubtless have some communication from him, for me." I imagined that I saw his eyes twinkle as he said this.

I bit my lip in embarrassment, but did not reply. I would willingly confide my misfortune to the major, but to do so before those country lunkheads standing by me, was more than I could endure.

"Captain Heywood," said the major finally, "I perceive that there is something wrong. It is a very serious offense with which you are charged. The fate of a spy, as you know, is to hang. I shall consider your case, and possibly refer it to the commander in chief. In the meantime I shall be obliged to have you confined in the guard room."

I was turned about and pushed through the door of the room already mentioned, which was immediately closed.

To my astonishment there sat old Mr. Everard and Ruth. They arose as

I entered and Miss Everard greeted me with a pleasant smile.

"I am glad to see that you have returned safely," she said.

"Yes," I replied, doggedly; "rather too safely for my own satisfaction."

"You had a letter from General Washington, did you not?" she inquired.

"Yes," I replied, with surprise, "but how did you know about it?"

"Because I stole it," she replied, laughing.

"What! You stole my letter!"

"From Captain Wilson, your friend," she added archly.

The whole situation was now as clear as day to me, so I was not overcome with surprise when she went on to tell how while I had my back turned, she had caught sight of Wilson transferring the letter from my pocket to his own; that while he was at the door bidding me good by, she had managed to make a rent in his coat which she offered to sew up for him. Although he was in a great hurry, he could not resist taking advantage of her kindness, and in the meantime she had secured the letter and had replaced it with a blank letter sheet which she had found among her belongings. When Captain Wilson put on his coat, and was ready to start, he felt in his pocket and was evidently satisfied with the knowledge that he had there a valuable bit of information.

After a slight delay Miss Everard explained the situation to Brady and together they started towards the mouth of the Croton after me, but met Major Ellery a short distance out. He received the note, and halted at the tavern for a while to discover my whereabouts, if possible.

Miss Everard said that she had her suspicions of Captain Wilson from the first.

I began to think how stupid I had been not to make sure of my letter before starting. To think that a hardened soldier like myself should have given more attention to Miss Everard's brown eyes than the business in hand! What a consummate fool she must think me! This was my reflection as I stood in embarrassed silence.

But to my relief at this moment Major Ellery appeared, and coming up, offered his hand.

"Captain Heywood," he said, his face radiant with good humor, "I must ask your pardon for my recent conduct, but I could not refrain from having a little sport out of your discomfiture. Besides, I knew that it would afford you an agreeable surprise to learn that this brave young lady saved your reputation as a soldier."

As soon as I had recovered sufficiently from my surprise, we rode to Sparta to secure Wilson, but he had disappeared, and the man of the house was nowhere to be found. We fired the place on the supposition that the owner was a Tory.

I gained Major Ellery's permission to accompany Mr. Everard and his daughter to Peekskill on the next day. And I might add, by the way, that I had by this time become so infatuated with the brown eyes that I managed to have a little private chat with their owner, which resulted in her changing her last name to Heywood, at the end of the war.

Parker C. Palmer.

THE MAJOR'S PLOT.*

A tale of intrigue and mystery, involving the Penrose family in a network of crime and bringing more than one life into jeopardy—Perilous experiences in the Indian cavern and a night's journey which ends in a terrible immurement—A boldly conceived conspiracy which stops at no expedients and hazards all risks.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

DICK PENROSE lives with his grandfather on the squire's extensive farm in Lewisberry, a country town near Harrisburg. Dick's mother is dead, and his father went abroad some fifteen years before, and has not been heard of since till one day he comes back, like one risen from the dead, in the shape of Major Horace Penrose, who accounts for his prolonged absence and silence by telling a fearful story of captivity among the Moors.

The night of his return a fire breaks out in a store in the village and Dick rescues an Englishman who had obtained lodging there for the night. This fellow, whose name is Henry Ford, strangely enough is recognized by the major as a valet whom he had brought from London with him, and from whom he became separated in New York. He is taken to the farm, where he and his master have many secret interviews.

In course of time the squire's health fails mysteriously, and Dr. Galen, the family physician, at last thinks he discovers evidence of vegetable poisoning being used. He suspects Ford, and one night sets Dick to watch what goes on in the sick room. Dick conceals himself in a large clothes press and is horrified to see his father enter the room, take a phial from his pocket and pour some fluid into the squire's medicine before handing it to him. Hoping that there has been some mistake, the boy determines to hurry off to Dr. Galen at once for an explanation. But in his excitement, he leaves the doors of the wardrobe open, the major learns that he has been watched, and Dick is captured and dosed with chloroform before he can get off the grounds.

The major proposes sinking Dick in the pond at once, but Ford takes him to a private insane asylum near New York, whence he makes his escape, aided by Dock Dawson, a trampish character who has turned up in Harrisburg, and who knows more about the major than the latter cares to have spread abroad.

Meantime the squire grows worse and the major urges that his new will be made at once. The family lawyer is summoned and the signature is about to be affixed in the presence of witnesses when a commotion is heard in the corridor and the next instant the door opens to admit Dick, followed by Dock Dawson, Henry Ford and a stranger with tanned skin and fair mustache.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—IN WHICH A STRANGE STORY IS RELATED.

AS Major Penrose saw the strange procession filing into the room his face assumed an ashen pallor.

"*Sacre !*" he muttered between his clinched teeth, and then, moving back from the bed, he stood still, with folded arms.

Mr. Grimwood looked on in stupefied amazement, and the doctor rushed forward to embrace Dick. But before he could accomplish this, the stranger in the rear of the party moved quietly forward, revealing, as the light shone full upon him, features that bore a startling resemblance to Major Horace Penrose.

**This story began in the November, 1896, issue of THE ARGOSY. The five back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 50 cents.*

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed Mr. Grimwood; and Dr. Galen, as the truth flashed across his mind, dropped feebly into a chair.

The stranger walked straight to the squire's bedside, and clasping the sick man's pale, wan hands in his own, he dropped his head on the bedclothes and burst into tears.

"Bress de Lawd, Massa Horace has come home dis time," sobbed Pompey from the hall, and then all was silence for the space of a moment or two.

The squire, still erect among the pillows, looked wonderingly at those in the room, hardly understanding what had taken place.

"Ah, there is Dick!" he muttered, as his eyes fell on the lad. "Dick is a good boy; he has come home again. Tear up that will, Grimwood. I have changed my mind. There is plenty for both. Don't cry, Horace, don't cry. You ought to be glad Dick has come back; you ought to be glad——"

Then he closed his eyes, and sinking low on the pillow, went calmly to sleep, entirely ignorant of what had just occurred.

The stranger rose to his feet and dashed the tears from his eyes.

"I am the real Horace Penrose," he said calmly. "I thank God that I have come in time to frustrate the most fiendish crime ever attempted by mortal man. There stands the scoundrel you have known as Major Horace Penrose. I denounce him as Eugene Maillard, the branded criminal from Toulon, the perpetrator of the great Bannister robbery, for whom the police have vainly searched for years, and I accuse him of attempting to poison my father and of trying to kill my son Dick, first by bullet, then by drowning. He has committed other terrible crimes, as these men can and will prove to your satisfaction," and Horace Penrose turned to Dawson and Ford, who were standing directly behind him, the one savagely triumphant, the other pale with fright.

It was a terribly dramatic scene, and all eyes were fixed on the false Major Penrose, the self convicted criminal; for the convulsive workings of his face, the trembling lips, the wildly rolling eyes, expressed the despair, the agony, and the deadly passion that were raging in his heart. Twice he attempted to speak, but his lips refused to frame the words.

Then, with a fearfully quick movement, he drew a revolver from his pocket and turned the muzzle on Ford.

"You traitor!" he hissed, as he pulled the trigger.

The report was followed by a loud cry, and as the smoke cleared Ford fell back on the floor.

Before any one had time to act, the assassin sprang headlong through the window, carrying sash and all with him. He cleared the porch roof at a bound, and swung nimbly into the yard.

"One thousand dollars to the man who stops him!" shouted Horace Penrose, as he bounded through the window in pursuit and ran to the edge of the roof, trampling the broken fragments of glass under foot.

Miller and Jackson were in the vicinity, but the assassin's weapon speedily scared them away; and when Horace Penrose reached the ground the desperate villain was spurring at full speed across the fields, mounted on the best horse in the stables.

The news spread through Lewisberry and the neighboring country like wildfire. Men on horseback and in buggies pursued the assassin clear into Harrisburg, and full information was telegraphed to the police from the nearest point on the railroad. Eugene Maillard—for by this name we must in future know him—was traced to the bridge, and here the trail ended.

Horace Penrose had gone straight to Harrisburg himself; but in the evening he returned to the farm, more than half convinced that his prey had made good his escape.

Here he found joyful news awaiting him. A decided change for the better had taken place in the squire's condition—produced, no doubt, by Dick's return—and he now had every prospect of recovery. Ford was lying in an upper room with a bullet in his lungs, but Dr. Galen declared that he would probably recover.

It was necessary, of course, that the squire should be kept very quiet for some time to come.

"He must be kept in ignorance of what has occurred," said the doctor. "The strange story can be broken to him very gently when his strength begins to increase."

The lower part of the house was thrown open that evening, and Betsy prepared such a feast as she had never equaled before in her life.

After supper the lamps were lit in the cozy library, and an expectant group gathered about the big table—Dr. Galen, Mr. Grimwood, Dick, Jack Douglas, Walter and Nellie Maynard, and Mr. Dock Dawson, who looked strangely out of place in such an assemblage. Horace Penrose sat at the head of the table; and all awaited with breathless interest the story he had to relate.

"It is fifteen years or more since I left this home," he began, "and little did I dream then of the long time that was destined to elapse before I would see it again. I wandered over the Continent, and finally located in Paris. Here I soon formed a circle of friends, and among them was the man who fled from the house today—a young Frenchman, who called himself Eugene Maillard. He was clever, witty, agreeable; in fact, a charming companion; though what principally cemented our friendship was the perfect resemblance we bore to each other—a resemblance, which as you have seen for yourselves today, is still as strong as ever. He was a brave man—I must say that much for him—and through his persuasion I was induced to enlist in the French Army.

"I have not time to relate my story in detail tonight. I must deal only with the leading facts. Let it suffice to say that our regiment was ordered to Algiers, where we saw much service among the Arabs. Then came the war with China, and we were ordered off to Tonquin. In that severe campaign I won my promotion and returned to Algiers a major.

"I was fated to enjoy my honors but a short time. A few months later Maillard and myself were captured while conducting an attack on a hostile tribe of Moors, and for the last six years we have suffered untold horrors from our cruel captors. Maillard and I were not separated, a fact for which I was extremely grateful at the time. We were slaves of the same shiek, worked

together, ate together, and slept in the same prison cell at night. I had managed to retain a bunch of home letters and a diary. These I read over to Maillard in our spare moments, and soon he was as thoroughly intimate with my past life as I was myself. Even then he must have been hatching the plot which he put into execution later on.

"Last July we were sold to a Moorish shiek, who lived many miles nearer the coast, and the treatment we received from our new master afforded a reasonable hope of escape. We planned our arrangements very cleverly, and one dark night we overpowered the guard and fled across the desert. My companion was stronger and in better condition than I. Morning found him comparatively fresh, while I was completely worn out and exhausted.

"It was necessary to go on, for our enemies were no doubt close behind. At sunrise we found a pool of muddy water in the desert, and while I was stretched on the sand, drinking in fresh strength and courage with every mouthful of the fluid, my companion knocked me senseless with a heavy club that he carried. I recovered my consciousness an hour later to find myself in the hands of the Moors. Maillard was miles away, and my diaries and letters were missing.

"I was dragged back to captivity; but just a month later I made a second attempt to escape, and this time reached the coast in safety at the harbor of Metilla. I could learn nothing here of Maillard, and I concluded that he had either perished in the desert or been captured by some wandering natives.

"A sailing vessel took me to Algiers, where I was greeted as one risen from the dead, and a few days later took passage to Marseilles, intent on reaching home as speedily as possible. My first intimation of what had occurred here during my absence came from Mr. Dawson, whom I encountered in a very remarkable manner, and also from the wounded man upstairs, who recognized me by the resemblance I bore to his confederate, and made an all but successful attempt to end my life. The story I have just related is but a link, I believe, in a long and complicated chain. We have still to hear Dick, Mr. Dawson, and Henry Ford. Their narrative will complete the chain."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—IN WHICH THE CHAIN OF EVIDENCE IS COMPLETED.

EXCLAMATIONS of wonder and amazement greeted the close of the remarkable story contained in the previous chapter.

"Now, Dawson," said the major, "as you were acquainted with Eugene Maillard even before I knew him, suppose you tell us what you know about him."

Dawson flushed slightly and hitched his chair closer to the table.

"Yes," he began hesitatingly, "I knew him sixteen years ago in New York City. He had just escaped from a French prison an' come to America. He was pretty young in those days, but he was an old hand in crime. He planned the Bannister robbery an' carried it out, too, though Henry Ford helped, and I had a hand in the matter myself."

Here Dawson reddened and became visibly embarrassed, while Lawyer Grimwood gazed severely at him over his spectacles.

"Go on," said the major kindly, "you expiated that offense and have since reformed. I can testify to that."

Dawson glanced gratefully at the major.

"Yes," he resumed, "I put in my time at Sing Sing, and all because Maillard turned traitor and played me into the hands of the police. He and Ford went to Europe, while I was breaking stone. That must be the time you met Maillard in Paris. It was a daring thing for him to go back there, when he knew the French police were looking for him. Ford went to London and stayed there for two or three years, if I ain't mistaken. Then I got out of prison at last, and just by accident ran across Ford one morning in the police station at Harrisburg. He denied his identity at first, but I was too sharp to be fooled in that way, and I traced him over into Cumberland County, convinced that something big was in the wind."

At this point Dawson reddened again, probably at the recollection of his encounter with the farmer's wife.

Then he proceeded to relate in a lengthy manner the balance of his story, with which the reader is familiar—his brief stay at the Lisburn inn, the assault committed on him by Maillard and Ford, his terrible adventures in the cavern at Rich Hill, his final escape into the open air—of which he retained but an imperfect recollection—and the midnight escape from the farmhouse.

This part of the story was almost incredible to his hearers. They found it difficult to believe the late Major Penrose capable of such terrible crimes.

Then Dawson told how he had gone straight to Harrisburg and worked to save money, of his chance meeting with Dick and Ford at the railway station, and how he followed them clear to Rockport on the Hudson. When Dawson ended, his hearers were still more amazed than ever.

It remained for Dick, however, to cause the greatest sensation. He began his story with an account of the interview between himself and Dr. Galen—and at this point the doctor interrupted him to state briefly what had first given rise to his suspicions.

Then Dick told in a thrilling manner of the terrible scene that he had witnessed from his hiding place in the wardrobe and of the assault under the locust trees. Here his remembrance ended, and he took up the thread of the story again at the asylum, relating everything that had happened to him there until his timely rescue by Dawson.

Then Dawson told of the flight to New York, and amused his hearers by an account of the fight on the Elevated Railroad. Their mirth speedily changed to horror, however, when he narrated the struggle in Mulberry Bend.

Thus threads of the story were drawn together one by one, and Dick was triumphantly vindicated. His voice trembled when he thanked Walter and Jack for their steadfast faith in his honor and honesty—not forgetting a share of gratitude to Miss Nellie, whose belief in his innocence had been fully as firm as that of the boys.

"The evidence was terribly strong, though," he admitted frankly, "and I don't in the least blame those who thought me guilty."

A few links were still needed to complete the chain—somewhat unimportant ones, it is true, but their absence at this time was very vexatious.

"Oh! by the way," exclaimed Dr. Galen suddenly, "how are we to account for that mark on this man Maillard's arm?"

"He must have put it there himself," said Major Penrose, "either with India ink or with chemicals. He knew that I possessed a mark of that kind, and feared that it would be called into question as a proof of identification. He was too cunning even to overlook such a slight matter as that. One thing I wish to say right here, Dr. Galen, and I know that all present will agree with me. My father owes his life to you. Your prompt action is all that saved the cowardly assassin from completing his work."

The major would have said more, but at that moment the doctor's embarrassment was relieved by Pompey, who came cautiously into the room and approached Major Penrose's chair.

"De man what was shot an askin' fur you an' fur de doctor," he said in an audible whisper. "He's bad, mighty bad."

"I must beg to be excused for a few moments," said the major, rising to his feet, and he hastily left the room, followed by the doctor.

There was plenty to talk about during their absence, and an hour slipped by unnoticed. Then Major Penrose and Dr. Galen returned.

"How is Ford?" asked Dick. "Will he recover?"

"I think he will," replied the doctor, "if no change sets in for the worse. The squire, too, is doing splendidly, and I no longer have any fears in his case. The crisis is past."

The major showed plainly that he had something important to say, as he took his seat at the head of the table.

"When we went up stairs an hour ago," he began, "we found Ford in a very restless condition. His wound was giving him much pain, and he feared that he was going to die. He declared that he wanted to make a full confession, and as he seemed to be greatly worried, Dr. Galen decided that it would be best to prop him up on pillows, and in short, broken sentences he told his story. Nothing was omitted, I believe, and I find that his narrative supplies the missing links in the history of this awful and stupendous plot. The confession was a great relief to Ford, and he is now resting with a very fair prospect of recovery. But I see that you are all anxious to hear what he had to say, so I will commence at once, though I will tell you in advance that the story is not a long one.

"You will be surprised to learn that Ford's participation in this crime was to some extent accidental. He confirms Dawson's statement concerning Eugene Maillard. He went abroad with Maillard after the Bannister robbery, and leaving his companion at Liverpool, went on to London, where he remained nearly five years. Then he returned to New York, living on his wits for some time, until by mere accident he encountered Maillard, who had just returned from Algeria. The scoundrel's plan was all matured at that time, as is shown by the fact that he registered under the name of Horace Penrose.

"Ford did not at once reveal himself to his old companion in crime. He

followed him to Harrisburg, foolishly make known his identity one dark night on the iron bridge over the Susquehanna, and was at once thrown over into the water. He saved himself by swimming, and made his way to Lewisberry. You all know how Dick so bravely rescued him from the burning building, and I may add here that this noble deed saved Dick's life on more than one occasion.

"By this time Maillard recognized the need of a confederate. He made proposals to Ford, threatening, in case he did not accept, to hang him for some terrible crime committed years ago in New York. What this was, Ford refuses to tell. It was committed before he knew either Maillard or Dawson, and Maillard only discovered it by accident. Ford was compelled to agree, and Maillard made known the whole plot, which, to state it briefly, was as follows:

"Dick and my father were both to be put out of the way, and then Maillard and Ford were to convert as much of the property as possible into cash, and flee to Europe, where they hoped to live in luxury and plenty for the remainder of their lives. This tremendous crime seems incredible on the face of it, but you have all seen how very nearly they succeeded. To go into details now would require more time than I can spare. It was Ford who committed the first robbery when the squire's will was stolen, and it was Maillard who shot Dick in the head. How determined he was to get Dick out of the road is shown by the upsetting of the boat on the Yellow Breeches Creek when Dick and Miss Maynard made such a wonderful escape.

"Ford declares that this was done on purpose, and I don't doubt it. He says, moreover, that Maillard had a confederate in some banking house who informed him of the contents of the second will—which was drawn up in your office, Mr. Grimwood—and also gave him statements of the squire's account from time to time. This is a matter that must be speedily looked into. Ford declares that this party is not known to him.

"Then Dawson here appeared on the scene, threatening to upset the whole plot, and was speedily put out of the way—forever, as they fondly hoped. The remainder of the story is too revolting to tell. Maillard actually began to poison my father, and was discovered at his deadly work by Dick. The rest you know—how Dick was attacked while running to inform Dr. Galen of his discovery, drugged with chloroform, and taken to a private asylum up the Hudson. It was Maillard who broke open the secretary that night and stole the money. He had intended to kill Dick and throw the body into the millpond, but Ford held out against this, and proposed the other plan, by which Dick was removed from the scene, and in a manner which allowed no suspicions to fall upon the perpetrators of the deed.

"I have one more thing to say. The keeper of this asylum, Dr. Clinch, is himself connected indirectly with the Bannister robbery, which explains how he was induced to receive Dick, ostensibly as a patient, but really as a prisoner. He shall pay dearly for his share in the crime. I shudder to think how nearly this awful villainy succeeded. I made a mistake in not bringing officers of the law with me from Harrisburg. Had I done so, Eugene Maillard would probably be now in custody. As it is, I fear greatly that he

has escaped, and that alone mars the gladness I feel at being restored to my family after fifteen years of exile."

The major paused, and at that moment a heavy rap was heard on the front door.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—A MIDNIGHT CLEW.

MAJOR PENROSE went to the door, and, as he opened it, the lamp that was burning dimly in the hall revealed a strange man standing on the porch.

"Are you Major Penrose?" he asked; and when the major nodded assent the other handed him a yellow envelope, saying, "Here's a telegram, sir, that was sent to Shiremanstown, with instructions to have it taken right over here at any cost. The operator sent me with it, and I came to Lewisberry on horseback, thinking you lived in the town. The postmaster told me where to find you."

The major hastily tore open the envelope and read the contents.

"It is well you came over with this," he said, turning to the messenger; "here is a reward for your trouble." He slipped a bank note into the gratified man's hand, and hastily closing the door, returned to the library.

The sight of the telegram caused a flutter of expectation.

"I must go to Harrisburg at once," said the major; "something has evidently turned up. This is the message I have received:

TO MAJOR HORACE PENROSE,

Lewisberry, Pa.

Come over at once.

BURNS, CHIEF OF POLICE.

"I will accompany you," said Mr. Grimwood. "I am anxious to see this thing through."

"And I, and I!" exclaimed every one present, not excepting Miss Nellie, who rose to her feet in great excitement. However, it was very plain that all could not go. Dr. Galen, of course, could not be spared from the house.

The major had immediately ordered the old family carriage and two horses to be brought to the door, and by the time it arrived it was definitely decided that the party should consist of Major Penrose, Mr. Grimwood, Dock Dawson, and Dick.

They drove hurriedly off through the rain and the darkness.

Old Pompey, who was mounted on the box, proved to be a skilful driver, and at two o'clock in the morning they rattled over the iron bridge and trotted rapidly down Market Street. They turned into Third Street and drew up before the station house.

Chief Burns was expecting them, and the whole party were hurried into the private office, where two persons were already seated, a portly, gray haired man, with gold rimmed glasses, and a youth of perhaps twenty with a pale, frightened face.

Chief Burns introduced the man as Mr. Medcroft, the banker.

"This is Mr. Barret," he added, turning to the young man, "who, if I am not mistaken, has brought us some very important information tonight."

"He has a very disgraceful story to tell, Major Penrose," said Mr. Medcroft, "but I think you will agree with me that he deserves some sympathy and some credit for making such a full confession."

Seeing that the interview had assumed a painful and embarrassing nature, Mr. Grimwood, Dock Dawson and Dick considerably went into another room.

Then, with many tears, and in a husky, broken voice, Frank Barret repeated in the presence of the major the confession that he had roused Mr. Medcroft out of bed to make some few hours before. It is not necessary to repeat this in detail, for the reader is already acquainted with the sad story of Frank Barret's crime.

Briefly the lad told of his dealings with the false Major Penrose, omitting nothing whatever.

"At nine o'clock tonight," he added in conclusion, "I was coming down Front Street on my way to Gamper's saloon to play a game of pool, and as I reached the dark alley that leads down into Market Square between Walnut and Market Streets, I saw a man creep over from the park and dodge into the alley. His collar was up about his throat, but I recognized him at a glance. It was the man I have always known as Major Penrose. I concluded to follow him—don't know why—and I kept close to him all the way to the square. A Herdic coach was standing in front of the Bolton House, and before I could get near he had dodged into this and was driving up Second Street. In front of the *Telegraph* office a big crowd was collected. They were reading the last edition of the paper that was pasted on the inside of the window. I pushed forward and saw the startling account of the Lewisberry crime.

"At first I didn't know what to do. Then I made up my mind to do the only thing that seemed possible. I went straight to Mr. Medcroft's house and made a clean breast of it all. He brought me right down here, and I told my story to Mr. Burns. I have gone terribly wrong I know—all on account of fast living. I went into bad company; I learned to drink and gamble; to frequent the theaters; I joined several clubs, and I had to dress well—these things took more money than I could earn, and I went down before the first temptation that came in my way.

"Do what you please with me, only—only think a little of my mother, of my sister. What will they think when they know all—oh, how can I endure the misery and the disgrace—"

Here the wretched boy broke down completely, and his convulsive sobs melted the hearts of every one present.

"The path of the transgressor is hard," murmured Mr. Medcroft softly, and then no one spoke for a moment.

"Time presses, gentlemen," said Chief Burns, in a hard, dry voice. "I must tell you what has been accomplished, and then we can decide on our course of action. Immediately on receipt of this information, I sent out and questioned all the drivers of the Herdic coaches. The right man was soon found. He had taken up a passenger in front of the Bolton House and let him off in the neighborhood of Third and Cumberland Streets. This was

no doubt Eugene Maillard. I feel confident that he is now sleeping soundly at No. 1622 Cumberland Street, where he held his interviews with Frank Barret. He has probably rented this room under an assumed name, and hopes to remain in hiding there until he can leave the city in safety."

"He is a desperate character," said Major Penrose. "I should advise you to lose no time in arresting him."

"I agree with you," responded the chief. "We will start at once. Your party, of course, will wish to see the thing through. I will procure a couple of cabs, and take a squad of officers with me. Mr. Medcroft can go along if he wishes, and your carriage, major, can follow in the rear."

In the confusion that ensued Major Penrose whispered a few words of hope in Frank Barret's ear.

"Come round to the bank as usual in the morning, Frank," said Mr. Medcroft. "I want to see you. You had better go straight home now. Your mother may be alarmed at your absence."

"And don't you intend to arrest me?" gasped Frank in bewilderment. "God bless you, Mr. Medcroft, and you, too, Major Penrose."

He walked unsteadily from the room and was gone.

CHAPTER XL.—IN WHICH THE VILLAIN IS TRACKED.

TEN minutes later two cabs and a carriage rattled up Third Street through the deserted city. It was still raining, and the wet asphalt threw grotesque shadows ahead of them as they passed under the electric globes. The illuminated clock on the capitol pointed to four as they crossed State Street, and ten minutes later they rolled into Cumberland Street and drew up at the curb a few doors from the grim, three story brick house that was numbered 1622.

The electric light shone dimly on the tin sign "Rooms to Let." Chief Burns sent four officers to invest the rear of the house by way of the back yard, and when a sufficient time had elapsed for them to reach their post he pulled the front door bell. A moment later the third story window was raised.

"What's wanted?" inquired a voice from above.

"Come down quietly," replied the chief. "Important business."

Five minutes passed, and then Mrs. Lee opened the door with a lighted candle in her hand.

"Sorry to trouble you, madame," said the chief politely, "but you have a lodger whom I wish to see. He came here about ten o'clock last night."

"Then it must be Mr. Andrew Drummond," said the landlady, "the man who travels for a book firm. This is the first night he has been here since—why, law bless me, there he is now. I thought he was sound asleep in bed." She pointed a trembling finger at Major Penrose, who was standing behind the chief.

"You are mistaken, madame," said the chief with a smile, "but Mr. Drummond is undoubtedly the man I wish to see. Show us to his room at once."

His authoritative manner, and the brass buttons on his coat frightened Mrs. Lee into silence. She led the way upstairs, followed by Chief Burns, Major Penrose, and three officers.

"There," she said, pausing before a door, "this is Mr. Drummond's room."

Chief Burns quietly turned the handle, but the door would not open.

"Locked on the inside," he muttered. "Where do the windows of this room open, madame?"

"On a shed," replied Mrs. Lee, in a shaky voice, "and that slopes close to the ground. Then comes the yard, and behind that the alley."

"Exactly," said the chief, "I see the situation. No doubt my men are in the yard by this time, so here goes."

He tapped sharply on the panel of the door, and as no answer came, repeated the summons three or four times.

"He can't be asleep," said Major Penrose; "he is such a desperate scoundrel that I half fear he will get away from us yet."

"Then the door must be broken into," rejoined the chief. "Now, madame," he added, turning to Mrs. Lee, "this is no place for you. Go down stairs and remain there. Whatever damage we may do to your house shall be paid for."

The landlady was only too glad to avail herself of this permission. She placed the candle on the floor and quickly disappeared.

Chief Burns placed his ear to the keyhole of the door and listened intently for a moment or two.

"By Jove, I hear a noise of some sort," he whispered. "Both together now, major. Here goes. One! Two!" With three both men dashed themselves heavily against the door, and it gave way, lock, hinges, and all falling with a crash inside.

Weapons were drawn instantly as one of the officers held aloft the candle, but it shone only on an empty room. There stood the bed, rumpled and disheveled, but its occupant had flown.

"The window!" shouted Chief Burns. "Look! It is open. The scoundrel must have dropped right into the hands of my men. No doubt they have the nippers on him by this time."

A loud shout, coming that instant from the direction of the yard, seemed to confirm the chief's words. He ran to the window and dropped lightly down on the shed, followed by Major Penrose and the officers. Just as the last man gained the sloping roof two or three revolvers cracked sharply from the yard, and some one called out, "There he goes, Burns. Don't let him get away."

Major Penrose turned and glanced up at the rear wall of the house. Dawn was just breaking, and in the dim light a figure was visible, crawling painfully up the water spout. It was Eugene Maillard; and even as the chief and Major Penrose watched him, the daring villain gained the edge of the flat roof, pulled himself on top and disappeared, apparently untouched by the bullets that had pattered around him.

The major was beside himself with rage and disappointment.

"A thousand dollars to the man who captures him," he shouted loudly.

This liberal offer created great excitement among the officers, and a rush was made to procure ladders. Chief Burns possessed a cool demeanor. A brief scrutiny of the roof which the fugitive had gained gave him the key to the situation. On the right was a four story building that towered some feet above the boarding house. The dwelling on the left was only two stories high, with a sloping roof and several gable windows in the attic.

"We'll get our man yet, major," he shouted encouragingly. "Don't lose a moment, though. Follow me closely."

He swung from the shed and dropped lightly into the yard. The police had broken open the door of the house, and rushing through, the chief and Major Penrose were speedily in the street. The rest of the party were standing in front of the house, and from all directions an excited crowd were gathering. All the windows in the neighborhood were open, and people were looking out, many of them in their night clothes. Down the street came four policemen on a run, bearing a long ladder on their shoulders.

The chief thundered against the door next to the boarding house, and it was opened instantly by an old man, who was struck speechless with amazement when the chief dashed past him and ran up the stairway, followed by the major and half a dozen officers. They soon reached the attic, and the chief tore both sashes from one of the front windows. His appearance was greeted by a hoarse cry from the crowd in the street.

With drawn revolver he crept out on the narrow ledge that ran along the front of the house, and in a moment Major Penrose stood beside him. They turned the angles of the window—the chief going to the right, Major Penrose to the left—and crawled up the shingles toward the crest of the roof.

The flat top of the boarding house was now in view, but nothing could be seen of the fugitive.

"Go carefully," whispered Chief Burns. "He must be very close at hand."

"I'm ready for him," replied the major, as he cocked his revolver.

CHAPTER XLI.—IN WHICH THE CURTAIN FALLS.

HARDLY had the words recorded at the close of the preceding chapter left the major's lips, than a head rose over the crest of the house and was followed by a sharp report and a red flash.

"I'm shot," cried Burns, and with a vain attempt to keep his balance, he slipped down over the shingles.

Three officers had already crawled out of the window, and as the wounded man came near they caught him tenderly and passed him through to their companions inside.

Major Penrose blazed away instantly, but too late. The assassin dodged out of sight.

A hundred throats were yelling hoarsely in the street below as the major advanced a few more steps up the roof. He hardly realized the extreme peril of the situation.

"The fiend shall not escape me," he muttered, and then he turned to the officers who were creeping behind him.

"Shoot at first sight," he whispered. "The assassin can never be taken alive."

Bang! A red flash blazed on the crest of the roof, and the weapon, shot from the major's hand, went spinning into the street far below.

"This is the last act," said a voice, hoarse with passion, and looking up, Major Penrose saw Eugene Maillard standing on the very pinnacle of the roof, not three yards distant.

"This is the last act," he repeated. "We will go off the stage together, major. But you will go first."

He turned the muzzle of his revolver into the major's very eyes. His finger was on the trigger, but with fiendish hatred he hesitated to end his victim's torture.

He had forgotten the presence of the officers below him—perhaps he did not know they were there—and as he toyed with the trigger of his revolver two shots rang out from the lower slope of the roof, and, with a shrill cry, Eugene Maillard dropped forward, rolling past the very feet of his intended victim, past the officers who held the smoking weapons in their hands, and then plunged over the edge of the roof into the street below. His fall was drowned in the cries of the people.

* * * * *

"This is the last act," Eugene Maillard had said, and he spoke the truth.

When dawn struggled through the chill November mists that wrapped the city in a shroud, his bruised and lifeless body was borne through the streets on a stretcher. All that day the city was in a ferment of excitement, and crowds clustered about the modest brick house at No. 1622 Cumberland Street, and surrounded the city hospital where the wounded chief of police had been taken.

Major Penrose and party went directly back to Lewisberry, and before nightfall the quiet country village wore an aspect that vividly reminded the middle aged citizens of "war times."

It is only proper that the curtain should fall with the death of the chief villain, and yet, as an audience can claim the right to bring their favorite actors out for a final bow before the lights are extinguished, the reader is surely entitled to the same privilege.

Squire Penrose recovered, and great was his amazement to learn the strange events that had taken place at the farmhouse during his sickness.

It is needless to say that Horace Penrose proved to be a model son. He and Dick will be worthy inheritors of the squire's possessions, and the good old man—who looks to be safe for twenty years yet himself—has no fears for the future.

Chief Burns pulled through after a hard fight for life, and all who had taken part in the Cumberland Street affair were amply rewarded.

It was the major's intention to deliver Ford over to justice, but that erratic individual escaped from the farmhouse one night while convalescent, and all attempts to recapture him proved fruitless. He is probably safe in

England by this time, and it is to be hoped his future life will be free from crime.

Dock Dawson's reward came in the shape of a permanent position on the farm. He receives a good salary, and is a trusted member of the household. There is no cause to fear that he will ever betray the confidence placed in him.

Dr. Galen will always be the nearest and dearest friend of the family. He is more popular than ever he was, not only in Lewisberry but throughout the neighboring country for miles, and his practice has assumed such overwhelming proportions that he finds it absolutely impossible to treat half of his patients.

Pompey and Betsy seem to have taken a new lease on life since the return of Major Penrose, and from all indications they will administer the affairs of the household for many years to come.

It is a gratification to be able to state that Frank Barret is still employed in the banking house of Medcroft & Holmes. His friends know nothing of the black page in his life.

His reinstatement was largely due to the influence of Major Penrose, though Mr. Medcroft was not averse to giving the lad a new trial. This confidence has not been misplaced, for Frank is now as steady and industrious as he once was wild and dissipated. He has learned a lesson that will stick to him through the future temptations of life.

Dr. Clinch was dealt with in a very summary manner. The New York authorities were informed of his complicity in the celebrated Bannister case, and he was promptly arrested. Dawson was the principal witness, and through his testimony the doctor was convicted and sent to Sing Sing for a term of years.

The asylum at Rockport on the Hudson was thoroughly ventilated by the newspapers and a radical change was made in its management and method of doing business. Most of the inmates, however, were genuinely insane, and among these was Dick's friend, Major Andre.

But three unfortunates were found who plainly had no business in such a place, and the exposure of the guilty parties who had put them there was a nine days' wonder.

The Antiquarian Club continues to flourish. The boys made several attempts to force their way into the cavern at Rich Hill. They had to abandon the plan, however, for the whole well had caved in and tons of earth and stone hid the entrance to the underground chamber where Dick, Nellie, Dock Dawson and John Manners so nearly lost their lives.

Miss Nellie Maynard, by the way, is just as pretty and charming as ever. She and Dick remain the best of friends, and though Dick is now away at college, they keep up the acquaintance just the same, as Mr. Jefferson, the postmaster, could no doubt testify if he chose.

Time alone can tell what results may develop from Miss Nellie's connection with the MAJOR'S PLOT.

William Murray Graydon.

LIVING IT DOWN.*

The deed that cost John Jeffreys months of misery—From pillar to post in quest of daily bread—
The remorseless fate that pursued a tarnished name.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

WHILE away at boarding school, John Jeffreys, during a game of football accidentally injures a boy so badly that his life is despaired of. Jeffreys thereupon runs away from Bolsover and returns to his guardian in York, who turns him adrift with only a sovereign, after informing him that the money left for him by his father has been lost through an unfortunate speculation. After tramping the streets for some time and receiving several rebuffs, Jeffreys finally finds a position as under teacher at Galloway House, a school for little boys, conducted by Mrs. Trimble. The boys take to him, which is sufficient to arouse the ire of Mrs. Trimble's surly first assistant, her son Jonah, who tracks Jeffreys on one of his evening rambles and afterwards abstracts from his pocket a letter speaking of young Forrester, the boy injured at school. Jeffreys is once more cast on the cold charities of the world, which throws him only one sop, in the shape of Julius, his guardian's dog, who has been abandoned when Mr. Halgrove moves away leaving not a trace behind. Jeffreys tramps his way to Grangerham, where he can find out but little about Forrester, and then, seeking refuge for the night in a tumble down shed, overhears a plot to abduct Percy Rimbolt, the fourteen year old son of a wealthy family in the neighborhood. With the assistance of the dog, Julius, he frustrates this and restores Percy to his home.

Mr. Rimbolt takes a fancy to Jeffreys and appoints him to the post of private librarian at a salary of a hundred pounds a year. He gets on famously with Percy, and is treated with marked favor by Raby Atherton, Percy's cousin, who is staying at Wildtree during her father's absence in Afghanistan with his regiment. But Mrs. Rimbolt dislikes the newcomer and neglects no opportunity to humiliate him. During the holidays Mrs. Scarfe and her son arrive on a visit, and in the young man Jeffreys recognizes a schoolmate at Bolsover, one fully cognizant of the Forrester affair. They merely exchange civilities, however, and in one way or another grate harshly on each other throughout the term of Scarfe's stay. Scarfe tries to prejudice Raby against Jeffreys, but she refuses to listen to tales of the librarian behind his back. Some time later, after the household has moved to London, Scarfe writes to Mrs. Rimbolt, telling in exaggerated fashion, why Jeffreys left Bolsover. Mr. Rimbolt, who has been made acquainted with the whole history and elected to take Jeffreys for what he is and not for what he was, is away, and as Mrs. Rimbolt requests the librarian to leave the house within half an hour, he has no choice but to obey. Once more adrift, he wanders about London, and is soon on the verge of starvation. One night he saves a man who has tried to drown himself and who proves to be Jonah Trimble. Jeffreys cares for him as well as he can, and then coming back one day to their poor shelter finds Jonah dead and a note from the "angel" he has talked of as visiting him, saying that he passed away peacefully, and the writing is that of Raby Atherton.

CHAPTER XXXV.—THREE ADVERTISEMENTS.

THE familiar writing caused Jeffreys to stare in a dazed fashion for a moment, then quitting the garret hurriedly he entered the room of a family of five who lived below him.

"Mrs. Pratt," said he, to the ragged woman who sat nursing her baby in the corner, "did you see who Trimble had with him when he died?"

"He's dead, then, sir"—these fellow lodgers of Jeffreys called him "sir" in spite of his misery. "I knew that cough couldn't last. My

**This story began in the October, 1896, issue of THE ARGOSY. The six back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 60 cents.*

Annie's begun with it; she'll go, too. It's been hard enough too keep the children, but it will be harder to lose them!" she cried

Jeffreys went to the bed where the little consumptive girl lay in a restless sleep, breathing heavily.

"Poor little Annie!" said he; "I did not know she was so ill."

"How could you? Yes, I saw the lady come down—a pretty wee thing. She comes and goes here. Maybe when she hears of Annie she'll come to her."

"Do you know her name?"

"No. She's a lady they say. I heard her singing upstairs to Trimble; it was a treat! You'll be glad of some help, I expect? If you'll mind the children, Mr. John, I'll go up and do the best we can for the poor fellow."

And so Jeffreys, with the baby in his arms, sat beside the little invalid in that lonely room, while the mother, putting aside her own sorrows, went up and did a woman's service where it was most needed.

The next day he had the garret to himself.

That letter—how he treasured it!—changed life for him. He had expected when Jonah's illness ended to drift back once more into the bitterness of despair. But that was impossible now.

He made no attempt to see the angel of whose visits to the alley he now and again heard. Indeed, whether he was in work or not, he left early and came back late on purpose to avoid a meeting. He had long been known by his neighbors only as John, so that there was no chance of her discovering who he was.

He worked patiently at the temporary manual labor on which he was employed, and when that came to an end he looked about resolutely for more.

Meanwhile—do not smile, reader—he made an investment of capital! In other words, he spent threepence in pen, ink, paper, and a candle, and spent one night in his lonely garret writing. It was a letter, addressed to a stranger, on a public question. In other words, it was an article to a London paper on "Life in a Slum, by One who Lives There." It was a quiet, unsensational paper, with some practical suggestions for the improvement of poor people's dwellings, and a few stories of experiences in which the writer himself had taken a part.

He dropped it doubtfully into the editor's box, and tried to forget about it. He dared not look at the paper next day, and when two days passed and he heard nothing, he concluded that the bolt had missed fire.

But it was not so. A week later, the postman entered Storr Alley—an unheard of event—and left him a letter. It contained a money order for ten shillings, and read:

"The editor incloses ten shillings for the letter on Slum Life, contributed by Mr. John to the paper of the 23d. He can take two more on the same subject at the same terms, and suggests that Mr. John should deal especially with—" And here the editor gave an outline of the topics on which the public would be most likely to desire information.

With overflowing heart, and giving Raby the credit, he sat down and wrote the two articles.

His first half sovereign went in a deed of mercy. Little Annie lay dead in her bed the night it arrived. Jeffreys, that morning, before he started to work, had watched the little spark of life flicker for the last time and go out. The mother, worn out by her constant vigils, lay ill beside her dead child. The father, a drunkard, out of work, deserted the place, and the two other children, the baby, and the sister scarcely more than baby, wailed all day for cold and hunger. What could he do but devote the first fruits of his pen to these companions in distress? The half sovereign sufficed for the child's funeral, with a little over for the sick mother. And for the rest, he took the baby to his own garret for a night or two, and tended it there as best he could.

The two fresh letters to the paper in due time brought a sovereign; but at the same time a chilling notification to the effect that the editor did not need further contributions, and would let Mr. John know if at any future time he required his services.

It was the abrupt closing of one door of promise. Still Jeffreys, with hope big within him, did not sit and fret.

Literary work might yet be had, and meanwhile bodily labor must be endured.

Towards the beginning of December, any one taking up one of the Loudon penny papers might have observed, had he been given to the study of such matters, three advertisements. Here they are in their proper order:

SHOULD this meet the eye of John Jeffreys, late private secretary to a gentleman in Cumberland, he is earnestly requested to communicate with his friend and late employer.

Readers of the agony column were getting tired of this advertisement. It had appeared once a week for the last six months, and was getting stale by this time.

The next advertisement was more recent, but still a trifle dull:

GERRARD FORRESTER.—If Gerrard Forrester (son of the late Captain Forrester, of the—Hussars), who was last heard of at Bolsover School, in October, 18—, where he met with a serious accident, should see this, he is requested to communicate with Messrs. Wilkins and Wilkins, Solicitors, Blank Street, W. C., from whom he will hear something to his advantage. Any person able to give satisfactory information leading to the discovery of the said Gerrard Forrester, or, in the event of his death, producing evidence of his decease, will be liberally rewarded.

The third advertisement, in another column, appeared now for the first time:

A YOUNG man, well educated, and a careful student of Bibliography, is anxious for literary work. Searches made and extracts copied.—Apply, J., 28A, Storr Alley, W. C.

It would have puzzled any ordinary observer to detect in these three appeals anything to connect them together. Jeffreys, however, glancing down the columns of the borrowed paper for a sight of his own advertisement, started and turned pale as his eye fell first on his own name, then on Forrester's.

It was like a conspiracy to bewilder and baffle him at the moment when hope seemed to be returning. He had convinced himself that his one chance was to break with every tie which bound him to his old life, and to start

afresh from the lowest step of all. And here, at the outset, there met him two calls from that old life, both of which it was hard to resist. Mr. Rimbolt's he decided to resist at all hazards. He still shuddered as he recalled the stiff rustle of a certain silk dress in Clarges Street, and preferred his present privation a hundredfold. Even the thought of his young friend Percy, and the library, and Mr. Rimbolt's goodness, could not efface that one overpowering impression.

The other advertisement perplexed and agitated him more. Who was this unknown person on whose behalf Messrs. Wilkins and Wilkins were seeking information respecting young Forrester? It might be Scarfe, or Mr. Frampton, or possibly some unheard of relative, interested in the disposal of the late gallant officer's effects. He could not assist the search. The little he knew was probably already known to the lawyers, yet it excited him wildly to think that some one besides himself was in search of the lad whose memory had haunted him for so many months, and whom, even in his most despairing moments, he had never quite given up for lost.

True, he had long since ceased to believe that he was really to be found by searching. Everything combined to baffle search, almost to forbid it, and yet he had constantly lived in a vague expectation of finding or hearing of him some day accidentally and unawares. But this advertisement filled him with self reproach. What right had he had to do anything, to rest a day, till he had found this lost boy—lost by his fault, by his sin? No wonder he had not prospered. No wonder the bad name had haunted him and dragged him down!

One thing was certain, whether what he knew was known to others or not, it was his duty to aid now in this new search. So he wrote as follows to Messrs. Wilkins and Wilkins:

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

The writer of this knew Gerrard Forrester at Bolsover School two years ago, and was responsible almost wholly for the accident referred to. The writer left Bolsover in consequence, and has not seen Forrester since. In May of the following year he made inquiries at Grangerham, Forrester's native place, where he ascertained that the boy had been removed there from Bolsover, and had remained for some time with his grandmother, Mrs. Wilcox. Mrs. Wilcox, however, was ordered to the South for her health, and died at Torquay. Forrester, who appears to have been a cripple, and unable to help himself, was then left in charge of his old nurse, who left Grangerham shortly afterwards, it is said, in order to take the boy to a hospital—where, no one could say. This is the last the writer heard. Messrs. W. and W. might do well to apply to the clergyman and Wesleyan minister at Grangerham, who may have some later news. The writer would be thankful to be of any service in helping to find one whom he has so terribly wronged; and any letter addressed "J., at Jones' Coffee House, Drury Lane," will find him.

It should be said that when Forrester was last seen, only faint hopes were held out as to his recovery, even as a cripple.

An anxious time followed. It was hard to work as usual—harder still to wait. The idea of Forrester being after all found took strange possession of his mind, to the exclusion of all else. The prospect which had seemed to open before him appeared suddenly blocked; he could think of nothing ahead except that one possible meeting.

So preoccupied was he that his own advertisement for work was forgotten

the day after it appeared. He called at Jones' Coffee House two or three times daily, and at last received the following :

Messrs. Wilkins and Wilkins will be much obliged if the writer of the letter of the 6th inst. will favor them with a call on Wednesday forenoon, as he may be able to assist them materially in the search in which they are engaged. Messrs. W. and W. will treat the interview as confidential.

CHAPTER XXXVI.—HIGH DUDGEON.

THINGS had not been going well with Percy Rimbolt since we saw him last, six or eight months ago, just before Jeffreys' expulsion from the house in Clarges Street.

Mrs. Rimbolt had some reason to modify her self congratulations on that occasion when Percy and Raby, who, it will be remembered, had been out riding at the time, returned home.

Percy returned in high spirits ; his new horse had turned out a beauty, and the canter in the park had acted like a tonic.

"Hullo, mother !" he said, as his parent came into the hall to meet him. "We've had a grand time, Raby and I. We saw the Prince of Wales and W. G. Grace and the Queen and everybody, and I gave Raby two hundred yards from the corner and ran her down before we were off Knightsbridge, and nearly got hauled up for furious riding. I say, I mean to make father get a horse for old Jeff, and we'll go out early in the mornings, when the Row's empty, and try handicaps, eh, Raby? Where's Jeff, I say?" and he ran whistling upstairs.

His mother, with some premonitory misgivings, followed him.

"Where are you, Jeff," she heard him shout. "I say, mother," he added, as Mrs. Rimbolt approached, "where's Jeff? Is he out?"

"He is," said Mrs. Rimbolt, solemnly. "I want to speak to you, Percy."

"All right. But I say, when will he be in? He said he couldn't leave his work this afternoon. I want him to see Bendigo before he goes round to the stables."

"You had better tell the groom he need not wait, and then please come to my room, Percy," said Mrs. Rimbolt.

Percy shouted down to Walker to send away the horse, and followed his mother into her boudoir.

"Percy, my dear boy," began the lady, "I am sorry to say I have just had to perform a very unpleasant duty. You can hardly understand——"

"What about—anything about Jeff?" interrupted the boy, jumping at the truth.

"It is. It has been necessary, for everybody's sake, that he should leave here."

"What!" thundered Percy, turning pale and clutching at the back of his chair; "you've sent Jeff away—kicked him out?"

"Come, Percy, don't be unreasonable. I——"

"When did he go—how long ago?" exclaimed the boy, half frantic.

"Percy, you really——"

"How long ago?"

"It is more than an hour since——"

Percy waited to hear no more; he dashed down the stairs and shouted to Walker,

"Did you see Jeffreys go? Which way did he go?"

"I didn't see——"

"Come and help look for him, he's sure to be about. Tell Appleby, do you hear? Raby, I say," he exclaimed, as his cousin appeared in the hall, "Jeff's been kicked out an hour ago! I'm going to find him!" and the poor lad, with a heart almost bursting, flung open the door and rushed out into the street.

Alas! it was a fool's errand, and he knew it. Still he could not endure to do nothing. He accosted the policeman at the corner of Clarges street.

"I say, have you seen a fellow go by—about an hour ago, pretty big, in a gray suit, from No. 50?"

"No 50? That's Rimbolt's, M. P., ain't it?"

"Yes, my father's. This fellow was the librarian there."

"Oh!" said the policeman, waking up; "has he took much?"

"No, you cad! But he's been sent away by mistake, and I want to find him. I say, have you seen him?"

"I can't say I have. I've only been on the beat half an hour."

Off dashed Percy, anxiously scanning the passersby, running on all sorts of false scents, losing hope every minute.

After two weary hours he gave it up, and returned home dispirited and furious.

Walker and Appleby had taken much less time to appreciate the uselessness of the search, and had returned an hour ago from a perfunctory walk round one or two neighboring streets.

Our young Achilles, terrible in his wrath, would see no one, not even his mother, not even Raby. Once or twice that evening they heard the front door slam, and knew he once more was on the lookout.

Mrs. Rimbolt, alarmed at the storm which she had raised, already repented of her haste, and telegraphed to Mr. Rimbolt to come to London.

Raby, bewildered and miserable, shut herself up in her room and was seen by no one.

It was a wretched night for everybody, and when next morning Mrs. Rimbolt, sitting down to breakfast, was met with the news that neither Master Percy nor Miss Raby wanted breakfast, she began to feel that the affair was being overdone.

"Tell Miss Raby I wish her to come down."

In due time Raby appeared, pale but composed.

"Raby, what is this nonsense about? It is unbecoming of you."

"What is foolish, aunt? I have a headache; it is really not my fault."

"Surely that is not sufficient reason for leaving me here by myself, when you know that I am in trouble about Percy."

"Poor Percy," said Raby, with a tremble in her voice, "he is dreadfully unhappy."

"I think, Raby, if, instead of taking his part in all this, you had some consideration for those who have acted for the best, and for your sake as well as for others, it would be more seemly."

"Auntie, I have no idea of not being grateful to you, or taking anybody's part against you. But I am sorry for Percy's unhappiness."

"I fear, Raby, your sympathy is not all given to Percy. But if any of it is given to Mr. Jeffreys, you had better know at once that the reason why he has been dismissed is that he is a criminal, who came here under false pretenses, with the most dreadful of all stains on his character."

Raby looked up at her aunt with something like the ghost of a smile on her lips.

"I don't believe that, auntie," said she. "I could never believe it."

"Then," said her aunt, stiffening up wrathfully, "we need not discuss the matter."

Percy came down presently, haggard and volcanic.

He plunged at once into the subject.

"Mother, I want to know why Jeff was sent away."

Mrs. Rimbolt replied pretty much in the words in which she had explained the matter to Raby.

Percy undutifully laughed the words to scorn.

"Who told you that?" he asked.

I should hardly have sent him away unless I had been satisfied there was no doubt at all in the matter."

"But who told you? and what was it he did?"

"My dear boy, you forget you are talking to your mother. You speak as if I were trying to deceive or wrong you. What has been done has been done for your sake; and you must be content to believe that there has been a good reason."

"I don't believe Jeff's a cad, that's all I can say. It's either a mistake or some one has been telling lies about him."

"Now, Percy dear, try to be reasonable. Forget all about it. Are you not going for a ride this morning? The fresh air will be good for you."

"I don't mean to get on Bendigo's back again till Jeff comes back," said said he, miserably. "Father may sell the beast; I hate him."

It was evidently no good arguing further; and the household settled down to a three cornered sulking match till Mr. Rimbolt arrived.

He, though he concealed his feelings better, was perhaps the most mortified of all at the misadventure which during his absence had turned Jeffreys adrift beyond recall. He had known his secretary's secret, and had held it sacred even from his wife. And watching Jeffreys' struggle to live down his bad name, he had grown to respect and even admire him, and to feel a personal interest in the ultimate success of his effort.

Now, a miserable accident, which, had he been at home he could have prevented by a word, had wrecked the work and the hopes of years, and put beyond Mr. Rimbolt's power all further chance of helping it on.

It was easy to guess what a reaction would take place in Jeffreys himself. Mr. Rimbolt knew his man well enough to be sure that the last thing he

would do would be to venture again within reach of the family from which he had been so ignominiously expelled. To please Percy, whose mingled wrath and grief it was pitiful to witness, he inserted a weekly advertisement in the papers, which nothing would have surprised him more than to find answered.

Whether Mrs. Rimbolt succeeded in concealing from her husband the source of her information, or whether he guessed it without asking, it matters little. The mischief was done, and with not the slightest prospect of any one being able to undo it.

About a week after Mr. Rimbolt's return, when all but Percy were beginning to settle down again into a semblance of their old order of things, Raby knocked at her uncle's door and inquired if he was busy. She looked happier than he had seen her since his return. The reason was easy to guess. The post had brought her a letter from her father.

"I thought you would like to see it," said she. "He has got leave at last, and expects to be home at the end of September. Will you read the letter?" added she, coloring; "there's something else in it I should like you to see."

The letter was chiefly about the prospects of coming home. Towards the close Lieutenant Colonel Atherton (for he had got promotion) wrote:

You ask me to tell you about poor Forrester and his family. He had no wife alive, and when he died did not know what had become of his only son. The boy was at school in England—Bolsover School—and met with an accident, caused, it is said, by the spite of a schoolfellow, which nearly killed him, and wholly crippled him. He was taken home to his grandmother's, but after she died he disappeared, and poor Forrester had been unable to hear anything about him. I promised Forrester that when I got home I would do what I could to find the boy and take care of him. You will help, won't you?

Raby watched her uncle as he read the passage, and then said:

"I asked father to tell me something about the Forresters, uncle, because some one—it was Mr. Scarfe—had told me that he believed Captain Forrester was the father of an old schoolfellow of his at Bolsover, who had a bad accident."

"Is that all he told you?" asked her uncle.

"No," said Raby, flushing; "he told me that Mr. Jeffreys had been the cause of the accident."

"That was so," said Mr. Rimbolt. "Sit down, my child, and I'll tell you all about it."

And her uncle told her what he had heard from Mr. Frampton, and what Jeffreys had suffered in consequence; how he had struggled to atone for the past, and what hopes had been his as to the future.

Raby's face glowed more and more as she listened. It was a different soldier's tale from what she was used to; but still it moved her pity and sympathy strangely.

"It's a sad story, as your father says," concluded Mr. Rimbolt; "but the sadness does not all belong to young Forrester."

Raby's eyes sparkled.

"No, indeed," said she; "it is like shipwreck within sight of the harbor."

"We can only hope there may be some hand to save him even from these

depths," said Mr. Rimbolt; "for, from what I know of Jeffreys, he will find it hard now to keep his head above water. Of course, Raby, I have only told you this because you have heard the story from another point of view, which does poor Jeffreys injustice."

"I am so grateful to you," said the girl.

Mr. Rimbolt let her go without saying more. Even the man of books had eyes that could see; and Raby's face during this interview had told a tale of something more than casual sympathy.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—JEFFREYS' CHAMPION.

THE season dragged on, and nothing occurred to mend matters at Clarges Street.

Percy moped and could settle down to nothing. He spurned his books, he neglected his horse, and gave up the river entirely. It was vain to reason or expostulate with him, and after a couple of months his parents marked with anxiety that the boy was really ill.

Yet nothing would induce him to quit London. Even his father's offer to take him abroad for a few weeks did not tempt him.

"I don't want to go, thanks," said he, "I'd hate to go."

"But," said his father, "you'd be better for it; and I should enjoy the run, too."

"Don't you and mother stay. I'll be all right here. Raby and I can keep house, you know."

"But Raby would come, too. In fact, I think we should go to Venice and meet her father there."

"All right; I shall be all right here, really, father. Please, I don't want to go."

"Percy, my boy," said his father kindly, "what is wrong with you?"

"Oh, you know what's wrong," said the boy, miserably. "You don't know how I cared for Jeff, or how good he was to me. I don't care for anything, now he's gone."

"But is it right for you to make yourself ill, and give your mother and me such anxiety about you, because of what cannot now be helped?"

"Oh, I don't want to worry you or mother; but—we may find him after all. Suppose he came back and found us all gone? I'll be all right here, really I will. You may trust me, father; only I don't want to go away."

There was no moving him. He yielded himself in other things more than usual to his parents' wishes. He dragged himself out for occasional exercise and made pretense of enjoying it to please them. But when it came to quitting London, he was as stubborn as a rock. They had to go without him at last.

Raby herself made the final appeal the day before they started.

"Percy, dear, won't you come for my sake?" said she.

"If I came for anybody I would for you," replied he, "but I can't."

"But I had so looked forward to your seeing father."

"I'll see him as soon as he gets to town."

"It will spoil my pleasure so much," said she. "I shall be miserable thinking of you."

"You're an awful brick, Raby; but don't bother about me. You'd all be ever so much more miserable if I came, and so should I."

"But what good can it do?" pleaded his cousin.

"I don't know—he might turn up. I might find him after all. If it hadn't been for your father coming, Raby—I'd have begged you to stay, too. He'd be more likely to come if he knew *you* were here."

Raby flushed. Between Percy and his cousin there was no hypocrisy.

"Oh, Percy," she said, "do you want to make me fifty times more miserable?" And she gave up further attempt to move him.

The travelers were away a month, during which time Percy kept his lonely vigil at Clarges Street.

As the reader knows, it was useless. Jeffreys was never near the place, and the lad, watching day after day, began slowly to lose hope.

But that month's experience was not wholly wasted. Memories of bygone talks with his friend, of good advice given, and quiet example unheeded at the time, crowded in on Percy's memory now, adding to his sense of loss, certainly, but reminding him that there was something else to be done than mope and fret.

What would Jeffreys have had him do? he often asked himself; and the answer was plain and direct—work. That had always been Jeffreys' cure for everything.

He got out his old books and his tools, and doggedly took up the work where he had left it. It was uphill, cheerless labor, but he was better for it, and the memory of his lost friend became none the less dear for the relief it brought him.

Only one incident marked his solitary month at Clarges Street—that was a visit from Scarfe about a fortnight after the travelers had gone. Percy had a very shrewd guess, although he had never heard it in so many words, who it was that was responsible for Jeffreys' disgrace and dismissal; and, that being so, it is not to be wondered at that his welcome of the visitor was not very cordial.

"Look here," said he, as Scarfe entered, and making no movement to return his greeting, "is it true you were the fellow who told mother about Jeff and had him sent away from here?"

"My dear Percy——"

"I'm not your dear Percy! Did you tell mother that story about Jeffreys?"

"Why, Percy, you don't mean to say——"

"Shut up! You can say yes or no, can't you?"

"I did my duty, and it's a mercy you're all rid of him!" said Scarfe, losing temper at being thus browbeaten by a boy of Percy's age.

"Very well, you can go! You're a cad, and you're not wanted here!" said Percy.

"You young prig!" began the visitor, but Percy stopped him.

"Look here," said he, "if you want to fight, say so, and come on! If you don't, go! You're a cad!"

Scarfe was staggered by this outburst ; he never suspected the boy had it in him. He tried to turn the matter off with a laugh.

"Come, don't be a muff, Percy ! You and I are old friends——"

"We're not ; we're enemies !"

"You mean to say," said Scarfe, with a snarl, "you're going to throw me up for the sake of a——"

"Don't say a word about Jeff !" said Percy, white hot, and springing to his feet ; "if you do I'll have you pitched neck and crop into the street ! Hook it ! No one asked you here, and you're not wanted !"

It was evidently useless to stay. Scarfe had no intention of coming to blows. He called, supposing the family was at home, in the hope of seeing Raby. Hearing only Percy was in town, he had asked to see him, and counted, now that Jeffreys was out of the way, on making an ally of the boy. This was the result.

"I came to see your mother," said he. "I can't congratulate you, Percy, on your hospitality, but I hope you'll be better next time I come."

Percy went out after him, and called down the staircase to Walker, "Walker, give Mr. Scarfe some grub before he goes."

The taunt about hospitality had stung him, and this was how he relieved his conscience on that point.

The evening before the travelers were expected home Walker announced that a gentleman had called inquiring for Mr. Rimbolt, but hearing he was from home desired to speak with his son.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—MR. HALGROVE AGAIN.

PERCY, ready to clutch at any straw of hope, and jumping at once to the conclusion that the only business on which any one could possibly call at the house was about Jeffreys, told Walker to show the gentleman up.

He was a dark, handsome man, with a few streaks of gray in his hair, and a keen, cold look in his eye which Percy mistrusted.

"We're old friends, I fancy," said he, nodding to the boy as he entered. "At least I fancy I saw you sixteen or seventeen years ago."

"I must have been jolly young then," said Percy.

"You were—about a week. Your father and I were college friends. I gave him up as a deserter when he married, and might have cut his acquaintance altogether, only as he happened to marry my sister, I was bound to keep up appearances and come and inspect my nephew when he made *his* appearance."

"You're my Uncle Halgrove, then ? I thought you were dead."

"I sympathize keenly with your disappointment. I am alive and well, and hoped to find my brother in law at home."

"They'll be back tomorrow," said Percy.

"Have you dined, my boy ?"

"No, not yet."

"That's well, they can lay for two. I'll sleep here tonight."

Percy scrutinized his uncle critically.

"Look here, uncle," he said, rather nervously, "it may be all right, you know, and I'd be awfully sorry not to be civil. But I never saw you before, and didn't know you were alive. So I think you'd better perhaps stay at your hotel tonight and come tomorrow when they all come home. Do you mind?"

"Mind?" said Mr. Halgrove. "I'm delighted if you are. You prefer solitude, so do I. Or perhaps you've been a naughty boy and left behind for your sins."

"I've stayed behind because I didn't want to go," said Percy.

"Well," said Mr. Halgrove, "I am sure your relatives are the sufferers by your decision. By the way, one of the things I came to see your father about was to ask him to help me out of a money difficulty. I've just landed from America, and my remittances are not here to meet me. Consequently I am in the ridiculous position of not being able to pay for the luxury of a hotel. But I understand there are nice clean railway arches at Victoria, and that crusts are frequently to be met with in the gutters if one keeps his eye open."

Percy was perplexed.

"Do you mean you're really hard up?" said he, "because if you really are, of course you'd better put up here."

"But I may be a fraud, you know. I may rob the house and murder you in your bed," said his uncle, "and that would be a pity."

"I'll take my chance of that," said Percy.

And so it happened that the house in Clarges Street had a visitor on the last night of Percy's lonely month.

The boy and his uncle began the evening with a good deal of suspicion and mutual aversion.

But it wore off as the hours passed. Mr. Halgrove had a fund of stories to tell, and the boy was a good listener; and when at last they adjourned for bed they were on friendly terms.

Percy, however, took the precaution to take away the front door key, so that the visitor could not abscond from the house during the night without his knowledge.

He need not have worried, however. His uncle appeared at breakfast the next morning, and made a good meal of it, by the way.

Percy was in considerable difficulty as to the ceremonies to be observed in welcoming his family home. For he had no notion of leaving the house in the possession of his suspicious uncle while he went down to the station. Nor could he bear the idea of not being at the train to meet them.

So he compromised matters by taking his complaisant relative with him, much to that gentleman's amusement.

It relieved him considerably when the train arrived to see that his mother recognized the stranger, though not effusively, as her veritable brother. He was thus able to devote his whole attention to his other uncle, whom he found considerably more interesting.

Colonel Atherton arrived in high spirits, like a schoolboy home for a holiday. He struck up an alliance with Percy at once, and insisted on taking

him off to the apartments near Regent's Park which were to be his and Raby's home for the next few months.

As he was saying good by to the Rimbolts he caught sight for the first time of Mr Halgrove.

"Why, bless me, is that you, Halgrove?" he said. "Why, I've worn mourning for you, my boy. This is a bit of sharp practice. Where did you spring from?"

"Perhaps I'm a ghost, after all. So many people have told me lately I'm dead that I begin to believe it."

"Never fear. If you were a ghost we should be able to see through you—that's more than anybody ever did with Halgrove, eh, Rimbolt?"

"Halgrove is coming home with us," said Mr. Rimbolt, "so when you and Raby come tomorrow we can talk over old times."

"Who would have thought of him turning up?" said the colonel to his daughter, as with Percy they drove off in their cab. "Why, I've not heard of him since that affair of poor Jeffreys, and——"

"Jeffreys!" exclaimed Percy, with a suddenness that startled the gallant officer, "did you say Jeffreys?"

"Yes; what about him? It was long before your time—a dozen or fourteen years ago."

"Why, he couldn't have been more than eight then; what happened to him, uncle, I say?"

The boy asked his question so eagerly and anxiously that it was evident it was not a case of idle curiosity.

"You must be meaning the son; I'm talking about the father. Wait till we get home, my boy, and you shall hear."

It required all Percy's patience to wait. The very mention of his friend's name had excited him. It never occurred to him that there were hundreds of Jeffreys in the world, and that his uncle and he might be interested in quite different persons. For him there was but one Jeffreys in the universe, and he jumped at any straw of hope of finding him.

The reader knows all Colonel Atherton was able to tell Percy and Raby—for the latter was not an uninterested listener—of the story of Mr. Halgrove's partner. Percy in turn told what he knew of his Jeffreys; and putting the two stories together it seemed pretty clear it was a history of parent and son.

Colonel Atherton could not fail to be impressed by the boy's excitement and agitation over the loss of his friend; and when struck by a sudden idea he turned to his daughter and said:

"I suppose this must be the gentleman you told me about in your letter? You never mentioned his name;" the blush with which she answered that it was, convinced him that the whole affair was a serious one, and wanted looking into.

They talked the matter over pretty frankly, and with Percy's assistance the case was made pretty plain to the disconcerted parent.

Early next morning the colonel was at Clarges Street, seated in the study with his two old college friends.

"Well," said he, "here's a case of we three meeting again with a ven-

geance. And what have you been up to, Halgrove, these twenty years? No good, I'll be bound."

"I have at least managed to keep clear of matrimony," said Mr. Halgrove, "which is more than either of you virtuous family men can say."

"Ah, well," said the colonel, with a sigh, "that's not all misfortune; witness my sweet daughter and Rimbolt's fine boy. What have you got to show against that?"

"Nothing, I confess."

"By the way, though, haven't you? The last I heard of you was in the papers—a record of a generous act on your part. You had adopted the son of an unfortunate partner of yours who had died. Is he still with you?"

"No," said Mr. Halgrove; "that turned out an unfortunate speculation in every way."

"Did the boy bolt?"

"Not exactly. I sent him to a first rate school, where he distinguished himself in a way of his own by an act of homicide."

"What?" exclaimed the colonel; and Mr. Rimbolt suddenly became attentive.

"Yes. He either quite or very nearly did for a young schoolfellow in a fit of the tantrums, and found it convenient to quit the place rather abruptly."

"What was the name of the school?" asked Mr. Rimbolt quietly.

"Bolsover, in —shire."

"Singular!" exclaimed the colonel. "I had a chum in India who had a boy at that very school."

Here the speaker became aware of a sharp kick under the table, and a significant look from Mr. Rimbolt. The old soldier was used to obey the word of command at a moment's notice, and pulled up now.

"I should think a thing like that would be very bad for the school," said Mr. Rimbolt, quietly, and in an offhand way.

"Fatal," said Mr. Halgrove. "I believe Bolsover went to the dogs after it."

"And so you had—you had young—what was his name?"

"Jeffreys."

"Young Jeffreys on your hands?"

"Scarcely. We parted company. As I told him, I never was particular, but a man must draw the line somewhere, and I drew it at manslaughter."

"What became of him?"

"Well, before I went abroad, he was teacher in a dame school in York. He may be there still, unless by this time all his pupils are devoured."

"Very unpleasant business for you," said Mr. Rimbolt.

"And," asked the colonel, with a wink at his brother in law, "did he, like the prodigal, take his portion of goods with him? I mean what his father left him."

Mr. Halgrove for a moment raised his brows uncomfortably.

"No," said he; "Benjamin Jeffreys was an eccentric man, and invested his money in eccentric securities. His son's money, like the lad himself, went to the dogs, and left me out of pocket by my term of guardianship."

I really advise neither of you to indulge your philanthropy in adopting somebody else's sons; it doesn't pay."

"Yours certainly was not a lucky experience," said Mr. Rimbolt; "however, when you were last heard of, fame reported that you could afford to drop a little."

"Time flies, and so does money. No one could repeat the libel now with truth. The fact is, this visit to an old college friend is a trifle interested. My journey to the West has turned out badly, and, greatly, as I should like it, I could not offer to lend either of you fellows a hundred pounds at this present moment. So I hope you won't ask me."

The talk here took a financial turn, and Mrs. Rimbolt presently joining the party, she and her brother were left to themselves while Mr. Rimbolt and the colonel took a short stroll.

Mr. Rimbolt took the opportunity of telling his brother in law what he knew, not only of Jeffreys, but of young Forrester; and the colonel told him of his obligation to find if possible the child of his dead companion in arms.

"It's a mixed up business altogether," said he, "and from all I can judge something of a family matter. My little girl, Rimbolt, whom you've been so good to, seems to be more interested in this librarian of yours than she would like any one to suspect—eh?"

"I have fancied so," said Mr. Rimbolt, "sometimes."

"Pleasant to come home and find everybody in the dumps about some one one has never seen. The sooner the rascal comes to light the better for everybody, and for my holiday. By the way, Rimbolt, that struck me as fishy about Jeffreys' money, didn't it you?"

"It did. I had never heard anything about Halgrove having a partner."

"I had. He went out of his mind and died by his own hand; but from what I knew of Halgrove then, I should say it was *he* who had a weakness for eccentric speculations. However, the money's gone; so it's all the same for young Jeffreys."

CHAPTER XXXIX.—AT WILKINS AND WILKINS'.

THE time passed on; and one day early in December, when she returned home, Raby found her father in an unwonted state of excitement.

"There's a clew, Raby, at last!" he said.

"A clew, father—you mean about young Forrester?"

"About both. It's the most mixed up affair I was ever in. Who do you suppose has written in answer to our advertisement about Forrester?"

"Has he replied himself?" asked Raby, disingenuously; for she guessed the truth.

"Not a bit of it. The letter's from Jeffreys. He doesn't sign his name of course; but he writes to say he was at Bolsover and was responsible for the accident; and repeats what Rimbolt knows already about his trying to hear of him in his native place. There's nothing very fresh about Forrester; but it may lead to our finding Jeffreys."

"Of course," said Raby, finding it hard to conceal her emotion, "he has written to the lawyers. Does he give an address then?"

"No—only a coffee house in Drury Lane. He's evidently on his guard against a trap. He writes private and confidential; but you can see he is ready to do anything to find Forrester."

"What shall you do?"

"Well, Rimbolt says leave it to the lawyers. Of course we've no right to trap him, and Rimbolt thinks Wilkins and Wilkins had better not mention our names, but let him know they are acting for Forrester's executors. If he's not scared during the first visit or two, he may consent to see me, or Percy—and among us we may be able to help him out of his present condition, which, to judge by his letter, I should fancy is rather reduced. He has been asked to call at Wilkins' on Wednesday, and they have promised to treat the matter as confidential—and we shall just have to trust they will talk him round."

Percy dropped in during the evening, highly excited by the news. He utterly scouted all these scrupulous precautions.

"It's rot I tell you! When you once get him there, what you ought to do is to shut the door and collar the key, and have Raby and me and father hidden somewhere in the room. He's bound to be caught that way."

"My boy, in times of peace one doesn't catch men like rats, unless, indeed, they are criminals. Unfortunately Jeffreys is not."

"All I can say is," said the boy, "after our looking for him so long it does seem hard lines to find him at last and no one be allowed to come near him. I'm certain if Raby went——"

"You're too impatient, boy. He'll come back to us of his own accord if we give him time. Unless we do we spoil everything, and shall probably scare him away for good."

"But if he knew how we wanted him?"

"Hasn't he seen your father's advertisement? It appeared in the same paper which had the advertisement about Forrester, so he is certain to have seen it. No; depend on it if he gets the least inkling we are on his scent he'll fight shy, and we shall never hear of him again."

This dreadful threat reconciled Percy to patience; and so it came about that Jeffreys was not the only person who looked forward anxiously and eagerly to the interview on Wednesday.

Little suspecting the interest which his movements were causing elsewhere, Jeffreys, on the appointed day, presented himself at Messrs. Wilkins and Wilkins' office.

He was so much changed by eight months' misery and privation that no ordinary acquaintance would have recognized in the broken down, haggard fellow who entered the office the once robust and stalwart librarian of Wildtree. Even Percy would have had to look at him twice to make sure.

However, there was no one present on this occasion to cause him any uneasiness as to the possibility of recognition. The clerk in the outer office left him standing a quarter of an hour before he deigned to look up and say:

"Come, be off; we've nothing for you."

"I want to see Messrs. Wilkins and Wilkins."

"I dare say you do. So do a lot of fellows. I tell you it's no use your waiting."

"I have an appointment," said Jeffreys, producing the letter.

The clerk looked at it hurriedly and said :

"And why on earth didn't you say you had? You were expected here a quarter of an hour ago. Here, come this way."

And he led the way to a room in which an elderly gentleman was seated writing.

"Here is the man you expected, sir," said the clerk.

Mr. Wilkins looked up curiously at his visitor.

"Ah," said he, "you have called in reference to that advertisement about Forrester. Quite so. Let me see. I have your letter here, Mr.—"

"It is not necessary to know my name," said Jeffreys.

"Just as you please. Of course, as you say you were at Bolsover School with Forrester, and were the cause of his accident, it is hardly worth while making a mystery of it."

"I forgot that. My name is John Jeffreys."

"Thank you. It is a very proper thing of you to offer to assist us in our search, and I shall be glad if in the end you should become entitled to the reward which has been offered."

"I would not touch a farthing of it," said Jeffreys, with a scorn that astonished the lawyer.

"Well, that's your affair. I can understand you have some remorse for what has occurred, and would be glad to help, reward or no reward."

"I would give my life to find young Forrester. Has anything been heard of him?"

"Not much, though we have been able to trace him rather farther than you did. We found a day or two ago a mention of the case of a lad, suffering from the results of an accident such as he appears to have met with, in one of the medical papers at the time. The case was reported as having been treated at the Middlesex Hospital, and I find on inquiry there that in December of that year Gerrard Forrester was a patient under treatment for some months, and in the May following was discharged as incurable. That, you see, was more than eighteen months ago."

Jeffreys felt his heart thump excitedly as he listened. It was little enough, but it seemed at least to bring him six months nearer to the object of his search.

"After that," said Mr. Wilkins, "we are unable to discover anything. The address entered against his name in the hospital books, which was probably that of his old nurse, cannot now be found, as the street has been pulled down a year ago, and no one recollects him. I saw the surgeon at the hospital, who remembered the case, and he explained to me that the boy when he left there might have lived a month or twenty years. In any case he would always have to lie on his back. It would be possible, he said, for him to use his hands—indeed he believed during the last week or two of his stay in the hospital he had amused himself with drawing."

"He was considered good at drawing at Bolsover," put in Jeffreys.

"So he may possibly have been able to earn a living of some sort. The strange thing is that he does not appear to have written to any one. He

might have communicated with his former head master, or some of his grandmother's friends at Grangerham, but he has not. According to Colonel—to my client's account, he does not appear to have written to his father, though it is possible a letter may have miscarried there. You have heard, no doubt, that his father died in action in Afghanistan in January?"

"Yes, I heard that—very gallantly."

"Yes, in fact the boy would, I believe, if he could be found, be entitled to a pension, besides what little property his father left. The account of the action, as well as our advertisements, has been in the papers. If Gerrard is alive he is probably somewhere beyond the reach of the press, and for my own part I cannot see how he can be in any but destitute circumstances."

This was all there was to say. But Mr. Wilkins' task was not yet done. He had been instructed to ascertain, if possible, something of Jeffreys' present condition, and to sound him as to his willingness to see again some of the friends of his old life.

"I am afraid," said he, "you, too, have had reverses, Mr. Jeffreys."

"Never mind me, please," replied he.

"You are living near here?"

"No."

"You must excuse me if I take an interest in you—as a former school-fellow of young Forrester's. You have come through much since then?"

"Not more than I deserve," said Jeffreys, fidgeting.

"My client, I think, would have been glad to see you, but as you made a point of this interview being confidential, I was not justified in asking him to be present."

"Oh, no. I don't want to see any one."

"It would be a great help to my client, who is a stranger in London, if you, who know Forrester, would assist him."

"Who is your client, may I ask?"

"My client," said Mr. Wilkins, resolved to make the venture, "is a Colonel Atherton, an old comrade of Captain Forrester's, who has undertaken to try and find the boy and provide for him."

Jeffreys started, and replied:

"No; I will do anything to help by myself, but I do not wish to meet him."

"You know him, then?"

"No, I have never seen him."

"He would, I can promise, respect your confidence, Mr. Jeffreys."

"I know, but I cannot meet him or any one. I will do anything he wants about searching for Forrester—he cannot be more anxious than I am—but I have every reason for wishing to remain unknown."

"You forget that it is hardly possible he can fail to know your name; and he has friends, some of whom I believe are deeply interested in your welfare."

Jeffreys shuddered.

"I can't say more," said he. "I will do all I can, but I want to see nobody but you."

"I may, of course, report this interview to my client."

"Of course; I can't prevent that."

"And I must tell him you definitely refuse to meet him."

"Yes. I cannot see him."

"Or tell him your address?"

"No; you know where a letter can find me."

"Well, will you call again—say this day week?"

"Yes; to see you alone."

Thus the unsatisfactory interview ended.

Mr. Wilkins was a man of honor, and felt he had no right to insist on Jeffreys opening communications with the colonel; still less had he the right, as he might easily have done, to track his footsteps and discover his hiding place.

Jeffreys, alive to a sense of insecurity, evidently expected the possibility of some such friendly ruse, for he returned to his work by a long circuitous course which would have baffled even the cleverest of detectives.

CHAPTER XL.—A BRAND FROM THE BURNING.

JEFFREYS seriously debated with himself that night the desirability of evacuating his garret at Storr Alley and seeking lodgings somewhere else. His old life seemed hemming him in; and, like the wary hare, he felt the inclination to double on his pursuers and give them the slip.

For, rightly or wrongly, he had convinced himself that the one calamity to be dreaded was his recapture by the friends in whose house his bad name had played him so evil a revenge.

Yet how could he leave Storr Alley? Had he no ties there?

Was it not worth worlds to him to hear now and then, on his return at night, some scrap of news of the ministering angel, whose visits cheered the place in his absence? He shrank more than ever from a chance meeting; but was it not a pardonable self-indulgence to stay where he could hear and even speak of her?

Nor was that his only tie now.

Mrs. Pratt, in the room below, had never recovered yet from the illness which prostrated her at little Annie's death; and night by night Jeffreys had carried the two babies to his own attic in order to give her the rest she needed, and watch over them in their hours of cold and restlessness.

He became an expert nurse. He washed and dressed those two small brethren—the eldest of whom was barely three—as deftly and gently as if he had been trained to the work. And he manipulated their frugal meals, and stowed them away in his bed, with all the art of a practical nurse.

How could he desert them now?

How indeed? That very night as he sat writing, with the little pair sleeping fitfully on the bed, a head was put in at the door and a voice said in a whisper: "Poor Mrs. Pratt's gone, John."

"What," he said, "is she dead?"

"Yes—all of a sudden—the 'art done it—I know'd she was weak there.

Poor dear—and her 'usband such a bad 'un, too, and they do say she was be'ind with her rent."

So the woman chattered on, and when at last she went, Jeffreys glanced at his two unconscious charges and went on writing.

No, he could not leave Storr Alley.

In the morning as usual he performed their little toilets and announced to the elder that his mother had gone away, and they might stay upstairs. Whereat the little orphan was merry and executed a caper on the bare floor.

A fresh dilemma faced the newly made father. He must work if he and his family were to eat. The thirty shillings he had earned last week could not last forever. Indeed, the neighbors all seemed to take it for granted he would see to Mrs. Pratt's burial; and how could he do otherwise?

That meant a decided pull on his small resources. For a day or two he might live on his capital, and after that—

He put off that uncomfortable speculation. The baby began loudly to demand its morning meal; and the three year old, having run through his mirth, began to whimper for his mother. Altogether Jeffreys had a busy time of it.

So busy that when, about midday, Tim, who had been perched up on a box at the window to amuse himself at the peril of his neck by looking out into the court below, suddenly exclaimed,

"There she is!" He bounded from his seat like one electrified, and for the first time realized that *she* might come and find him!

There was barely a chance of escape. She had already entered the house; and he became aware of the little flutter which usually pervaded the crowded tenement house when she set foot in it.

She had many families to visit; and each grudged her to the next.

What could he do? Wait and face her, and perhaps meet her look of scorn, or, worse still, of forgiveness? Or hide from her?

He debated the question till he heard her enter the chamber of death below.

With a groan he gathered together his papers, and bidding Tim mind the baby till he returned, seized his hat and hurried from the room.

He went out miserably into the street and waited within view of the entrance to the alley till she should come out. It was long before she appeared—he guessed how those two friendless little orphans would detain her. When she came her veil was down, and in the crowd on the pavement he lost sight of her in a moment. Yet he knew her, and all his resolution once more wavered, as he reflected that he was still within reach of her voice and her smile.

He returned anxiously to the attic. The baby lay asleep on the bed, and Tim, perched on his window seat, was crooning over a little doll.

There was a flower on the table; the scanty furniture in the room had been set in order, and his quick eye noticed that a rent in Tim's frock which had caused him some concern in the morning had been neatly mended.

Tim came and put the little doll into his hands.

"She gave it me. Will she come soon again?" said the child.

"Yes; she's sure to come again."

"You ran away, you was afraid. I wasn't."

In a strange turmoil of emotion Jeffreys resumed his writing. The flower in the cup beside him was only a half withered aster, yet it seemed to him to perfume the room.

Till midnight he labored on; then, cold and wearied, he put out his little candle and laid himself beside the children on the bed.

He had scarcely done so when he became aware of a glare at the window, which brought him to his feet in an instant. It was a fire somewhere.

His first panic that it might be in the house was quickly relieved. It was not even in Storr Alley, but in one of the courts adjoining. He looked down from his window. The alley was silent and empty. No one there, evidently, had yet had an alarm.

Quickly putting on his boots, he hurried down and made his way in the direction of the flames. From below they were yet scarcely visible, and he concluded that the fire, wherever it was, must have broken out in the top story. Driver's Court, which backed on to Storr Alley, with which it was connected at the far end by a narrow passage, was an unknown land to Jeffreys. The Jews in Storr's had no dealings with the Samaritans in Driver's; for Storr Alley, poor as it might be, prided itself on being decent and hard working, whereas Driver's—you should have heard the stories told about it. It was a regular thieves' college. A stranger who chanced into Driver's with a watch chain upon him, or a chink of money in his pocket, or even a good coat upon his back, might as soon think of coming out by the way he entered as of flying. There were ugly stories of murders and mysteries under those dark staircases, and even the police drew the line at Driver's Court and gave it the go by.

Jeffreys had nothing to apprehend as he rushed down the passage. He had neither watch, chain, nor money, nor good coat. His footsteps, echoing noisily in the midnight silence, brought a few heads to the windows, and almost before he stood in the court there was a cry of "Fire!"

Terrible anywhere, such a cry in a court like Driver's was awful indeed. In a moment the narrow pavement swarmed with people, shouting, cursing, and screaming. Although even yet the flames scarcely appeared from below, a panic set in which it was hopeless either to remove or control. Chairs, tables, mattresses were flung, it seemed at random, from the windows. Mothers, not venturing out on to the stairs, cried down to those below to catch their children. Drunken men, suddenly roused, reeled fighting and blaspheming into the court. Thieves plied their trade even on their panic stricken neighbors, and fell to blows over the plunder.

Still more terrible was the cry to others who remained within.

Children, huddled into corners, heard that cry and it glued them where they stood. The sick and the crippled heard it, and made one last effort to rise and escape. Even the aged and bedridden, deserted by all, when they heard it, lay shouting for some one to help.

The flames, pent up at first and reddening the sky sullenly through the smoke, suddenly freed themselves and shot up in a wild sheet above the

court. The crowd below answered the outburst with a hideous chorus of shrieks and yells, and surged madly towards the doomed house.

There was no gleam of pity or devotion in those lurid upturned faces. To many of them it was a show, a spectacle; to others a terrible nightmare, to others a cruel freak of Providence, calling forth curses.

The flames, spreading downwards, had already reached the second floor, when a window suddenly opened, and a woman, with wild disheveled hair, put out her head and screamed wildly.

The crowd caught sight of her, and answered with something like a jeer.

"It's Black Sal," some one shouted; "she's kitched it at last."

"Why don't you jump?" shouted another.

"Booh!" shouted a third. "Who skinned the cripple?"

The woman gave a scared look up and down. The flames at that moment wrapped round the window, and, with a wild howl, the crowd saw her disappear into the room.

Jeffreys all this time had been standing wedged in the crowd, a spectator of that hideous scene and now a witness of this last tragedy.

With a desperate effort he fought his way to the front, hitting right and left to make himself a passage. It was a minute before he got through. Then the crowd, realizing as if by intuition his purpose, staggered back, and raised a howl as he dashed into the door of the half consumed building.

The first flight of steps was still intact, and he was up it in a moment; but as he dashed up the second the smoke-swirled down in his face and half choked him. He groped—for it was impossible to see—in search of the door; and, guided partly by the roar of the crowd without, and partly by the shrieks within, he found the room.

It was full of flame as he entered it, and to all appearance contained nothing else. The wretched woman, finding the stairs worse to face than the window, had rushed back there and flung herself desperately on the heads of the crowd below.

As he turned to save himself, Jeffreys, amid the roar of the flames, caught the sound of a shout from the corner of the room which he had imagined to be empty.

Rushing toward it, he made out the figure of a lad on the floor, blackened with smoke, and evidently unable to move.

Yet he was not senseless, for he called:

"I can't walk—help me."

Jeffreys caught him in his arms in a moment, and only just in time. He had literally to wade through flame to the door; and when he reached the stairs outside, the dense smoke, reddening every instant, burst upon him well nigh overwhelmingly.

How he staggered down that awful flight with his burden he knew not. More than once he stumbled; and once a shower of falling embers all but stunned him. It was all done in a minute.

Those who watched without marveled how soon he returned; and when they perceived that he bore in his arms a living creature, even Driver's Court swayed back to let him pass, and cheered him.

Happily a cry of "Engines!" at the other end of the court diverted the crowd still further and enabled him to stagger forward clear of danger.

"Drop him, he's a dead 'un," shouted some one who stopped a moment to peer into the face of the senseless lad.

"I'll give you a shilling to help me with him out of this," said Jeffreys.

It was a shilling well spent. Unaided he could never have done it, but with the sturdy gladiator to clear the way he was able at last to reach the comparative seclusion of Storr Alley.

The offer of another shilling prevailed on the man to carry the lad to the attic.

Then for the first time, left to himself, he looked in the face of this unexpected guest. And as he did so the room seemed to swim round him. He forgot where he was or what he was. He looked down on an upturned face, but not one blackened with smoke. It was white and livid, with green grass for a background—and the roar he heard was no longer the distant yell of a panic stricken mob—but boys' voices—voices shouting to himself!

Yes, for the last time that vision rose before him. Then with a mighty effort he shook off the dream and looked once more in the face of the boy who lay there on the floor of the Storr Alley garret. And as he did so, young Forrester slowly opened his eyes.

Talbot Baines Reed.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

JEM'S WAY.

A story of flush times in the Pennsylvania coal regions—The startlingly novel way in which Jem Beardsley settled scores with the man who had done him an evil turn that could not be forgot.

DURING the civil war the anthracite region of Pennsylvania enjoyed a season of unexampled and delirium producing prosperity. An extraordinary demand for the coal, scarcity of miners, and the unusual amount of money in general circulation, combined to raise wages to astonishing figures. Miners earned from ten to twenty dollars a day. Unused to such prosperity they seemed intoxicated by their amazing fortune and indulged recklessly in the wildest prodigalities. Gold watches were common as pocket knives. The black mine mud was tramped into costly Brussels and Axminster carpets on cabin floors. Pianos were bought by families that did not know a note of music. Champagne was a favorite drink in the saloons, taking the place of beer, and brandy supplanted whisky. There was much gambling. Few thought of saving money for a possible "rainy day" in the future. Some sober, steady going old fellows, however, bought ground, erected handsome homes and furnished them well.

One of the provident men was Jem Beardsley, an English miner, in Wilksbarre. He was an old bachelor, saturnine, and of powerful physique. His comrades laughed at him when he built a house, but saw a method in his madness when he brought in a wife as the completion of its handsome furnish-

ing. She was an ignorant, but very pretty girl, not half his age, daughter of a poor farmer named Carter. Beardsley's wealth dazzled her. Until they were married she never saw him that he was not dressed like a banker, and under these circumstances he was rather a fine looking old fellow. Her first sight of him in his rough working clothes, black as a negro—all but the bald top of his head, which his cap had protected and that looked like an ostrich egg—disillusioned her and she began regretting her hasty marriage.

Bob Aunam, a vicious but good looking young miner, came over from Shandoka on a protracted spree and in some way struck up an acquaintance with Mrs. Beardsley. If Jem, in his best clothes had seemed a banker, Bob looked to Lucy, as she saw him every day, like Solomon in all his glory. It did not seem possible that he was ever black and rough, and he squandered money as if he had trunksful of it. Furthermore he had the advantage of youth on his side and was very much more entertaining than Jem had ever been.

Jem was a faithful and tireless worker, proud of making big bills—his receipts being proportionate to the quantity of coal he sent to the surface—and worked more hours per diem than any other man in the mine except his helper. That gave Lucy much more leisure and loneliness than were good for her. The duties of her simple housekeeping took little of her time and she lacked amusement. Jem had bought a piano for her, but she could not play upon it—in fact its only use was for Jem to sleep on in hot nights. He found it cool.

One evening when Jem came up from the mine, his wife was absent and he had to kick in the door to get "washed up" and find some cold remnants for a supper. But he was more anxious than annoyed. Something, he feared, had happened to Lucy. Kind neighbors told him that any accident to her must probably have come close to hurting Bob Aunam at the same time. He had never heard of the young fellow before and now looked for him in vain. Bob was gone. And Lucy never came back. When no longer able to expect her return, Jem sold his house, quit work, drew his money out of the bank and disappeared. It was rumored that he had enlisted as a soldier.

* * * * * * *

When Bob Aunam's season of merrymaking was at an end he went back to work in the Black Eagle mine at Shandoka, to the great rejoicing of his helper, who had been in enforced idleness during his absence. But hardly two months later that helper mysteriously disappeared. A crony of his affirmed that some unknown man had given him a thousand dollars, simply to go away to Pittsburgh and stay there, but nobody believed such an improbable story. His defection was a serious matter for Bob. A miner must have a helper, to whom he pays a percentage upon his earnings and whether he makes much or little depends a great deal upon the ability and industry of that assistant. Good helpers were scarce, the most competent ones finding more lucrative employment as contracting miners. Bob therefore esteemed it a godsend when a sturdy man, giving the name of Bill Wells and claiming ample experience applied for the vacant position. It was given to him and he proved himself a very efficient man.

The memorable accident by which the Black Eagle mine was fired occurred when Bob and his new helper had been working together about three weeks. The flames started near the bottom of the main shaft, from a carelessly managed forge, it is said, and spreading rapidly, soon stopped the use of the hoisting machinery. Happily there were comparatively few men in the mine at the time and when the hoist was stopped, there was still a way of escape, generally known, through some old workings, into the Carbon King mine.

In fact all did so escape, except Bob Aunam and his helper, who at the time of the accident were driving a "breast" in the lowest level and at a remote point. Word was passed back to them by fleeing men's shouts, that the mine was burning. Bob dropped the drill he was holding and sprang to his feet with a cry of alarm, but before he could take to his heels, the helper caught his arm and asked, "What are you going to do?"

"Get up to the second level above and through to the Carbon King."

"No. I don't think you will," answered Bill coolly.

Very far off and faintly sounded the cries of the last escaping miners.

"It's our only chance. The hoist is sure to be stopped."

"No matter. Bide a bit, lad. We want to talk a little."

"Talk! You blithering idiot. Leave go my arm, or I'll strike you."

"I'll take my chances of that. Come back to the breast and sit down."

Bob's answer was a savage blow, dealt with all his force at the face of the man holding him, but it had been expected and was cleverly parried. In another second, they were in a life or death struggle, wrestling and striking ferociously. The miner believed himself dealing with a madman. The helper knew he was battling against the courage of terror. The latter, although the elder man, was stronger, cooler, and soon proved himself the best wrestler. By a "grapevine lock" he dashed his antagonist to the ground with stunning force, and then, while sitting on him, tied his feet firmly together and bound his hands behind his back with a strong cord he had ready in a coil. When Bob recovered consciousness he was helpless and Jem was throwing water in his face to revive him.

"What in thunder are you trying to do?" he demanded.

The helper emptied his cap of the water with which he had been sprinkling Bob's face, put it on his head and replied, as calmly as before, "We want to talk a little."

"I'll listen to you a month if you'll let us get out of this first. Are you such a fool you don't understand our escape is liable to be cut off any minute?"

"I expect it will; I only want to improve this chance for getting acquainted before it's too late. My name isn't Bill Wells. It's Jem Beardsley."

Bob uttered an exclamation of horror.

"Yes," continued the helper, "Jem Beardsley, whose wife you stole."

"I didn't steal her. She came along of her own accord, just because she wanted to. She begged to come. I didn't know you. I never saw you. I thought she was a widow. She told me she was. I swear to heaven she did."

Jem did not interrupt him, but when he ceased speaking answered:

"That's a lie, and you know it and shouldn't swear to it. Not that it matters anything to me; but you'll be held to account for it before this day is over."

"Forgive me, Jem. I'd never have done it if I'd known you. I swear I wouldn't. I'll give her back to you."

"I've no use for her any more. Neither have you. But hear me say this to you, lad. If you'd honestly fell in love with her and meant well by her according to your lights, she being young and foolish and naturally more taken with a younger man—which I ought to have had sense enough to expect—and you'd been good to her after you got her away from her home and her good name and dependent on you alone, I would have gone off without saying a word, and you'd never have heard of me again. I've watched you to see if I could find that excuse for you. It wasn't there. You're a selfish brute and as such you've treated her. You've made her life bitter with your bad tongue and only last Sunday night you blacked her eyes."

"I was drunk, then, Jem, or I wouldn't. I'll never do it again."

"No. You will not."

"Why do you say that in such a way? Do you mean to murder me? Help! Help! Murder!"

Jem waited placidly until the echoes of the terrified wretch's yells died away and were succeeded by a profound stillness, when remarking, "I guess we've got the mine to ourselves. Shouting won't do you much good," he listened a moment more and then replied: "No. It won't be murder."

"I'll give you fifteen hundred dollars, all I've got, and my notes secure for as much more if you'll let up on me."

"I'm not selling Lucy."

"Give me a fair chance. Let me up and give me a show to fight for my life."

"What for? You're no match for me. It would just be to give myself the trouble of downing you again and that's not worth while."

"You're afraid! You're a coward! Help! Murder! You mean to cut my throat while my hands are tied. Murder!" And as he shrieked he writhed and tugged vainly at the wire-like cord that bound him.

"What's the good of exciting yourself and going on in that way? You can't break that cord. I picked it out and have carried it two months for you. And I told you there'd be no murder. When I set out to look for you, I took a vow that if I was let find you, I wouldn't kill you; I'd do no more than insure natural circumstances having a chance at you. That I swore to and I mean to keep my oath. The circumstances are here, and I mean to keep you face to face with them until they, not I, make an end of you."

"The air seems to be getting sort of thick. I shouldn't wonder if they had covered the up take with timbers and earth to cut off the draught and smother the fire. And of course the fans are stopped. That would be enough to make the ventilation bad."

"If you don't let me go, you'll never get out alive yourself. You don't know the way to the Carbon King and I do. Stop your cursed fooling mighty soon or you'll die with me."

"I expect to."

Bob poured forth a torrent of abject prayers, wild invectives, blasphemies and agonized shrieks for help. Jem deliberately lighted his pipe and listened tranquilly, without reply. After a time he noticed that water was rising about him and Bob in the chamber which was considerably above the level of the tunnel. "Hello!" he exclaimed. "The pumps have stopped and this level is filling." He went out a little way and found the water up to his knees and rising rapidly. "They must be trying already to flood the mine. That's prompt work," he commented. Returning, he lifted Bob upon his shoulder and carried him and the lantern, wading mid-leg deep a long distance, to a steep incline, up which he toiled to the next level.

"Jem," pleaded Bob huskily, "you may have a right to take your revenge on me, but you don't want to harm them that never did anything to you. Think of my parents. It would break my mother's heart to have her boy die down in the mine, and my poor old father would never get over it."

"Danny Brennan has known you since you were a kid. You've done time for beating your poor old father, who never wants to see or hear of you again, and your mother died of a broken heart, on your account, before you were of age. What a miserable, cowardly, shallow liar you are! Why don't you brace up and, since you've got to die—and you have, this day, so sure as God hears us—try to meet death like a man?"

"Oh! Jem. I'm not fit to die."

"I'm no judge of that. All I'm sure of is that you're not fit to live."

Their colloquy was violently interrupted by a terrific explosion that really took place in some upper level of the labyrinthine mine, but seemed to be everywhere. It had almost the effect of an earthquake. Huge pillars of coal cracked, with reports like artillery, and great pieces flew from their sides like missiles fired from guns; vast masses of roof rock fell with awful crashes, sending thunderous echoes rumbling down the cavernous depths of the mine; a tornado-like wind roared through the tunnels, bursting open the ventilation doors, hurling empty coal cars from their tracks, tossing the two men as ocean waves toss floating oars.

When Jem came to himself, after a period of unconsciousness, he was bruised, bleeding, in perfect darkness and could not find his companion anywhere near. Again and again he called "Robert! Where are you?" There was no reply. Although Bob heard him he held his breath and was still. He hoped his implacable enemy might not discover him before a rescuing party came.

Jem reflected. Standing in the tunnel he had caught the full force of the wind, while Bob lying along the wall had probably been less its sport. The lamp was irretrievably gone, but Jem was too old a miner to be without the means of making a light. In a tightly corked bottle he carried matches and he had a bit of candle in a pocket. After the great wind succeeded such stillness that the air seemed to have died. The candle flame rose straight from the wick, as if burning in a closet. Holding it above his head he retraced the way along which he had been thrown and soon discovered the man he sought, who groaned audibly in despair at his recapture.

"That," remarked Jem, as one who states a fact, but without feeling any personal concern in it, "is probably the beginning of the end. The choke damp should soon begin to settle now." And placing the candle on the tunnel floor, he seated himself comfortably to watch it. "I wish I hadn't lost my pipe," he grumbled.

Bob renewed his supplications, weeping, protesting and praying in an agony of craven fear, without eliciting a word of reply.

The flame suddenly vanished.

Jem groped for the candle, picked it up and made haste to lift the helpless man upon his shoulder again. He held him there, steadied against the wall, while he relighted the candle. Then, moving slowly and cautiously, he went from chamber to chamber, farther down the long tunnel.

"Not this way! Turn back, for the love of heaven! You are getting farther away from the up drift!" shrieked the burden, struggling hard to free himself.

"Yes. I know," replied Jem. At length he found what he sought, a chamber where the first cut had been made across the top of the breast instead of at the bottom, a variation sometimes necessitated by exceptional conditions. A broad bench of coal was left at a height of about four feet from the floor. Upon it he laid Bob, shoving him well back, and seated himself on the edge, with his legs dangling down. The roof was so low that he had to sit in a half reclining position, resting his weight upon an elbow. The candle he set near the edge of the bench, not far from Bob's face.

The young man began to feel hope that Jem only meant to frighten him almost to death and would yet, at the last moment, let him escape. But with that hope mingled a sickening fear that that last moment might be too long delayed.

"What's the use of climbing up here?" he protested. "If the choke gets this high, we'll never get out alive. Why didn't you let me be, on the floor, if you meant to kill me this way?"

"If I could, lad, I'd keep thee for a month, just arm's length from death and, at last—let him clutch thee."

Robert, abandoning hope, raved and wept.

How long they waited, neither knew.

Suddenly the invisible fingers of approaching death again pinched out the little flame and Bob uttered a scream of terror.

Jem quickly tore off his jacket, rolled it into a bundle and thrust it, as a pillow, under the miner's head. Then he once more lighted the candle and held it up. "Not long to wait now," he said coolly.

Presently Bob struggled and gasped for breath, heaved himself upon one elbow and cried "Mercy! Air!"

Jem looked at him with calm interest, silently, forgetting, in the absorption of his regard, to keep the candle above the rapidly rising tide of deadly gas and for the third and last time, its light was extinguished. He did not trouble himself to find another match. Bob was quiet and still at last.

After a little Jem fell backward.

J. Henderson.